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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1965 Vol. 17, No. 3

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

THE MOVING TARGET

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The life of Shayne's client had been in jeopardy so many times the case had a "cry wolf" aspect. But Mike knew that a killer didn't have to look like a wolf.

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THE MOVING TARGET

The New MIKE SHAYNE Thriller

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Halstead had cheated Death by a narrow margin so often that he seemed to bear a charmed life. But the redhead knew that the odds always lengthen as the stakes rise.

MIKE SHAYNE knew that someone was waiting for him in his private office the instant he saw Lucy Hamilton's face as he strode through the outer door that morning. He also knew by the prim and very neutral expression in the brown eyes of his pert secretary that the visitor was female, young, and definitely pretty.

"A Miss Halstead to see you, Michael," Lucy said, her manner all business. "I imagine it's about a case."

"Isn't it always, angel?" Shayne said innocently, his big, gaunt face set in mock seriousness.

"I'm sure I couldn't say," his brown-eyed secretry said.

Shayne laughed. "Honest, angel, I never heard of Miss Halstead. Is she *that* pretty?"

"Why don't you hurry inside and find out," Lucy said acidly.

Still laughing, Shayne entered the private office. He liked Lucy's mild show of jealousy. It showed that even after all the years together his secretary still did not take him for granted, nor he her.

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Miss Halstead was tall, slender, blonde, and very good to look at. She stood up from her chair as Shayne entered. Standing, she was even better to look at. Not at all the Miss America type, she was much more the Miss Universe type. Shayne smiled as he walked into his office.

"Mr. Shayne?" Miss Halstead said.

Shayne tossed his panama onto the hat rack and sat down behind his desk with his back to the bright Miami morning sun. Miss Halstead's voice did not match the magnificent figure and face. It was a young voice, light, and both sad and more than a trifle frightened. Shayne waved her to return to her chair. The girl sat as if she were accustomed to being ordered to do things.

"Miss Halstead," Shayne said. "What Miss Halstead would that be?"

"Anna Halstead," the girl said, and her eyes were now big and wet. Anxious eyes. "They're trying to kill Dad!"

"They?" Shayne said.

"One of them. Someone," the girl said. "They all hate Daddy."

Shayne knitted his bushy red eyebrows and studied the beautiful girl. The face and figure were deceptive, especially the figure. Anna Halstead had the body of a Miss Universe, but Shayne guessed that she was hardly more than sixteen or, at most, seventeen.

Shayne smiled reassuringly. "Apparently they haven't succeeded yet, Anna," he said quietly, "So suppose you tell me about it, starting with just who 'Daddy' is, and who 'they' are."

"My father is Fletcher Halstead, Mr. Shayne," the girl said. "I suppose you've heard of him."

Shayne considered. The name Fletcher Halstead did have a familiar ring to it, and a somewhat unsavory ring. Something to do with his reporter friend Tim Rourke. Yes, a story Rourke had written. Something to do with business also—big companies.

Shayne suddenly remembered. Fletcher Halstead the financial wizard! The man who specialized in reorganizing shaky companies, sometimes buying them, and was not always too careful about how rough he got. Rourke's story had been about a reorganization of a local company where the whole management team had been fired by Halstead.

"I've heard of him," Shayne said. "He has enemies."

"A man like Daddy makes a lot of enemies, Mr. Shayne," Anna Halstead said, and her voice shook again, "and one of them is going to kill him unless you stop it!"

"Whoa, Anna," Shayne said. "Just exactly what happened?"

The beautiful young girl took a deep breath. "Well, about two weeks ago was the first time. Daddy and I were out on the boat

when it sank. We hadn't been out more than twenty-five minutes, maybe a half a mile off shore, when we realized the boat was flooding. It sank and Daddy had to help me to shore. He's a very good swimmer. We didn't hit anything, it just sank. When we brought it up the boat had a hole in it."

"What did your father say?"

"He just laughed and said you could hit something big enough to tear a hole like that and not know it."

"Yes, it's possible," Shayne said. "Go on."

"A week ago there was a fire in Daddy's room. The butler found him just in time. The smoke had almost gotten him."

"How did the butler happen to save him?" Shayne asked.

"George always calls Daddy early on Thursdays for golf. It was a Thursday morning," Anna said.

"Lucky," Shayne said. "What started the fire?"

"Daddy says it was a cigarette," Anna said. "He'd been smoking, but I never saw Daddy smoke in bed, or before breakfast!"

"Your father doesn't seem to share your opinion that someone is out to kill him," Shayne said.

"Oh, Daddy's foolish!" Anna cried. "He's too brave. He just won't think about it."

Shayne was studying her closely. Her anger and fear for her father seemed genuine enough. A young girl alarmed by a series of strange accidents that threatened her father's life. Only those two accidents were hardly enough.

"What happened today or yesterday?" Shayne said.

Anna blinked. "How did you—?"

"The boat sank two weeks ago, the fire was a week ago, but you didn't come to me until today," Shayne said. "What happened?"

"The plane blew up," Anna Halstead said, "there was a bomb in the plane!"

Mike Shayne stared at the girl. She stared back, her beautiful face white as chalk and deadly serious.

"A bomb?" Shayne said. "In what plane?"

"The company plane," Anna Halstead said. "Daddy and some of his executives were flying to New York. Just as they were about to get on the plane it blew up! Just a small bomb, but if they had been in the air—"

"It went off before they got aboard?" Shayne asked.

Anna nodded. "The police asked that," she said. "Is it so important?"

Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe, frowning to himself in the quiet office. He watched the sun shining on Anna Halstead's blonde hair.

"Has your father had any notes, any threats?" Shayne said slowly.

"No. At least, none that he told me about," Anna said.

"You said the police asked questions. Did your father finally decide he was in danger and call them?"

"No, the company called them about the bomb. Daddy told the police he thought it must have been some crank, some poor insane person," Anna said.

"Your father's either a very brave or very stupid man," Shayne said drily.

The big detective stood up. He smiled down at the beautiful young girl. She stood and faced him, her hand taking money from her purse.

"All right, I'll look into it," Shayne said. "But your father could very well be right about the bomb having been planted by a nut."

"I hope so, Mr. Shayne. But I want to be sure," Anna said.

Shayne nodded. "Okay. Now you go home, and you can pay my secretary. I'll come out to see your father in an hour or so. You better tell him."

"He won't like it, but I'll tell him. It's my money," Anna said firmly.

II

AFTER ANNA HALSTEAD had gone, Mike Shayne sat staring out his window for some time. A bomb was no accident. Coincidence? Perhaps, but he doubted it. He reached for the telephone. He dialed Miami Police Headquarters and asked for Chief Will Gentry. The gruff-voiced Chief of Police was soon on the line.

"Mike? What's up?" Will Gentry asked.

"I want to find out about the Halstead bombing," Shayne said into the telephone.

"Halstead? How did you find out?" Gentry asked.

Shayne explained that he had been hired by Anna Halstead. Gentry snorted loudly at the other end of the line.

"Leave this to the Bomb Squad, Mike. That's what they're paid for."

"What kind of bomb was it, Will?" Shayne asked, ignoring Gentry's last remark.

"Very simple, Mike. Black powder, simple time-clock fuse," Gentry said. "The kind of bomb that could be made by any kid who took high school chemistry. It wouldn't have hurt a ten-year-old kid, but it would have blown out the rudder controls and crashed the plane. It looks like it was set to do just that. The controls were smashed on the ground by the explosion."

"Why did it go off?"

"Who knows?" Gentry said. "Bomb Squad thinks a faulty fuse, or just bad setting. They say it was the work of a real amateur."

"Any ideas about why it was planted?" Shayne asked.

"None," Gentry snapped. "A crank, a nut, some joker with a

grudge. A kid even. Who knows?"

"Could it have gone off when it did on purpose, Will?" Shayne asked. "I mean, perhaps it was intended to just scare Halstead or the others."

There was a long silence at the other end of the line. Shayne could hear the heavy breathing of the bluff Miami Chief of Police. When Gentry spoke again he was cautious.

"Sure, Mike, we thought of that," Gentry said slowly. "In fact, it's usually the first thing we think of in a case like this. Extortion. It's a standard operation. Only Halstead swears he's gotten no notes and no one has asked him for anything. Until we know better, we have to take his word while we try to trace the bomb. That won't be easy, according to the Bomb Squad. The bomb was too simple."

"What about the other two things? The 'accidents'?" Shayne said.

"What other things? What the devil are you talking about?"

Shayne explained what Anna Halstead had told him about the boat and the mysterious fire. Gentry swore like a thirty-year veteran.

"Halstead never told us there were two previous attempts on his life. No wonder the police can't get things done!"

Shayne tugged on his earlobe as he held the receiver. "They could have been real accidents, Will. Maybe he doesn't want them connected."

"He should have told us, damn it! We could give him protection if he asked for it!"

"I'm going to see him, Will. I'll talk to him."

Gentry muttered something inaudible. "You talk to him good, Mike. And let me know what you find out. Our hands are tied unless

he asks for help, or we can trace that bomb."

Shayne hung up. In his office he sat and rubbed his gaunt jaw. The case was becoming interesting. Two accidents and a bomb that exploded prematurely. Only Anna Halstead did not think that the 'accidents' had been accidents at all, and bombs did not go off so prematurely as a rule.

On the other hand, no extortion seemed to be involved, no warnings—unless Fletcher Halstead knew more than either his daughter or the police. Perhaps the bomb had simply been the work of some mentally unbalanced per-

son, and perhaps it had just been poorly fused, and perhaps the accidents had been nothing more.

One way or the other, it was time to talk to Fletcher Halstead.

Shayne got up, clapped his panama on his unruly red hair, and strode from his office. He grinned at Lucy Hamilton as he went past her. She made a pretense of being completely preoccupied with a letter she had just finished typing.

In his car Shayne drove in the sun through the crowded streets of Miami. On the fast-moving thruway he headed north toward the rich and elegant suburb where Fletcher Halstead lived according to the address given to Lucy by Anna Halstead. When he reached the house it was just about what he had expected to see—big, expensive-looking and hidden away behind a high fence in the center of thickly-wooded grounds.

Shayne gave his name at the gate and drove up to the front of the mansion along the curving drive. He parked before the colonnaded front door, got out and started up the front steps.

A single shot rang out in the silence, so deafeningly loud that Shayne barely heard the cry of horror that echoed through the house a split second later. He burst through the door running.

The shot had come from the right wing, and the big redhead raced through the halls and rooms of the giant mansion toward where someone was shouting frantically for help.

Other people moved now in the house, but Shayne reached the door first.

III

THE ROOM WAS the study at the far end of the mansion's right wing. Books lined all the shelves set against the panelled walls. Leather arm chairs and a leather couch faced a large, mahogany desk. There were papers on the desk as if someone had been at work.

A tall, wiry man stood in the center of the room. About fifty years old, he wore a large, bristling mustache beneath a head as bald as an eagle egg. The sun shone on the tall man's bald head through the opened window. When he saw Shayne he stopped and stared at the detective, a dazed look on his face.

Shayne's eyes swept the room. A few feet from the window another man lay sprawled. An ugly stain of blood spread across the floor even as Shayne watched. The detective strode to the fallen figure and bent down. But there was nothing he or anyone could do. The man on the floor was dead—shot once directly through the heart.

"The shot came from the window," the tall man said. "I heard someone out there, but he shot

first. It must have been me he was aiming at. But Paul was between me and the window, and the bullet struck him instead."

"Call the police," Shayne said. "Now!"

Mike Shayne strode to the opened window and leaned out. Trees and thick bushes grew close around the house here at the corner. The house itself ended only a few feet away from the window. Anyone out there could have vanished into the bushes, or around the corner in an instant even in the bright sunlight.

Shayne looked down at the ground under the window. He was looking for possible footprints. What he saw was a pistol.

On the ground in front of the window and half hidden in the bushes Shayne saw a long-barreled German Luger. He heaved himself over the sill, descended to the ground and picked up the pistol by the barrel. He smelled it. The big, ugly-looking gun had been fired very recently.

Shayne wrapped the gun in his handkerchief and put it carefully into his pocket. Then he climbed back into the room.

Other people were in the room now. A small and very pretty woman stood just inside the door. She wore a long, flowing house coat of some expensive material. Her face was a study in shock and a certain fear. Shayne guessed that she was about forty, give or take a few years, and she was vaguely familiar to him.

Near the woman, but farther into the room, was a heavyset man with a long scar on his tanned face. The man was about fifty and wore the clothes of a butler. This, then, would be George who had so luckily saved Fletcher Halstead from the fire. At the moment he did not seem to quite know what he should do.

The third newcomer was Anna Halstead. The beautiful blonde girl had no hesitation about what she should do. She ran straight to the tall, bald man and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Daddy, it was you! They tried to kill you!" Anna cried as she clung to him.

"Yes," Fletcher Halstead said. He patted her shoulder. "There, Anna, I'm all right."

Anna looked down at the dead man, and shuddered.

"He stepped in the way," Fletcher said, his bald pate glistening in the sunlight. "It had to be for me, I know that now."

Shayne stepped toward Fletcher Halstead. The bald man seemed to really see him for the first time. Halstead stared, puzzled for a moment, and then the tall man with the bristling mustache began to nod.

"You're Mike Shayne, I recognize you," Halstead said.

"Why do you think the shot was for you?" Shayne said.

But Halstead looked down at his daughter who still clung to him. "Of course. That was where you went this morning. She hired you to protect me, right, Shayne?" he said.

"I had to," Anna said.

Shayne scowled. "She should have done it sooner from the look of this. I asked if you really think the shot was intended for you, Mr. Halstead."

"Who else?" Halstead said, his gaze resting on the slain man. "Why kill Paul?"

"Who was Paul?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Paul Brack was my assistant. Rather like a confidential secretary only at far higher pay and with far more training and experience," Halstead said.

Shayne nodded toward the butler and the woman who still had said nothing at all. The pretty woman looked as shocked and frightened as she had when Shayne had first looked at her.

"How about them?" Shayne asked.

"My wife, Vera," Halstead said, "and George, our butler."

"Mrs. Halstead," Shayne said, nodding his head to acknowledge the introduction. He realized what was familiar about her. She resembled her daughter Anna.

The woman seemed to blink. She turned her head slowly and looked at Shayne. Then she turned her eyes just as slowly to look down at the sprawled out figure on the floor.

"Why would anyone want to kill Fletcher?" Vera Halstead said. "Poor Paul, always so efficient."

Shayne looked at the bald man. "Just why would someone want to kill you, Halstead?"

"I don't know, Shayne. I have enemies, I suppose, who may hate me for business reasons. But hardly enough to kill me."

"Someone seems to hate you enough," Shayne said drily. "Where was everyone when the shot was fired?"

They all looked at one another. Fletcher Halstead was the first to speak.

"Well, you know I was right here in this room," the tall financier said.

"And you didn't get a look at the killer?"

Halstead shook his head. "It happened so fast. I heard this noise. I stood up from the desk and walked out toward the center of the room. Paul came to meet me. There was a shot and he fell. I started calling for help. I never thought of looking out the window."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. Shock, surprise, could make a man act oddly, and it was possible that Halstead was telling the truth. On the other hand he could just as easily be lying.

"I was upstairs in my room," Anna Halstead volunteered. "I was

playing records. I guess I was alone No one saw me."

Shayne nodded again. "And you, Mrs. Halstead?"

"What?" The pretty, small woman looked startled. "Why, I'm afraid I have no alibi either, if that is what you want. I was lying down. I often get migraine headaches, and I was lying down in my room. It was dark. I keep the shades drawn."

"No one happened to see you?" Shayne asked.

"No, I sent my maid away."

"Maid?" Shayne said.

"Yes, Jessica. I believe she went swimming. She often does if I give her an hour or so," Vera Halstead said.

George, the butler, said, "She's on the beach. I saw her go down. It's too far to hear a shot."

"And where were you?" Shayne asked George.

"In the rear pantry, cleaning the silver," the butler replied. "I heard your car drive up, and I was about to put on my coat and go to the door when I heard the shot."

"I suppose you were alone, too?" Shayne said.

"Yes sir, I'm afraid I was."

"And there are certainly back staircases, and rear halls, so that anyone could sneak around unobserved if they wanted to," Shayne said.

"I'm afraid so, sir," George confirmed. "It's a very big and old house."

"All right," Shayne said. "You all better leave except Mr. Halstead. But stay in the house. The police will want you."

As soon as they were alone in the study, Shayne faced the financier.

"All right, Halstead, now who could be out to kill you?" Shayne said.

"I really don't know. Almost anyone I've beaten in business, I suppose."

"Is your fence electrified, wired for an alarm?"

"No," Halstead said.

"So anyone could have gotten to that window. But let's narrow it down. It has to be someone who

knows you and your habits and your company and this house. Someone who knows them well. He knows when you like to take your boat out, where your room is, and just when you like to work in this study. And he seems to have known when you were planning to fly to New York. Now who hates you and fits that description?"

Halstead shook his head slowly. "The only people not in this house who could know all that are Doris, my first wife, and Adam Howell."

"Who's Howell?" Shayne snapped.

"He was my partner once. He lived here while we were working on a deal. He lives in Miami still, and so does Doris," Halstead said.

Shayne took the pistol from his pocket and unwrapped it. He held it out toward Halstead. "Do you recognize this gun?"

Halstead stared. "Well—I—"

The voice came from the doorway. A harsh, angry and very bitter voice. "He knows it, and so do I. I should have known he'd try to frame me for something!"

IV

THE MAN WAS small and skinny, about forty years old. He glared hatred at Fletcher Halstead. And standing around and behind the small man were Will Gentry and his men. The Miami Chief of Police came into the room.

"We found him sneaking around in back of the house when we drove up," Gentry said to Shayne. "Name's Adam Howell."

The man snarled, "Sure, Adam Howell, the sucker! I should have known he was up to something when he called me! It wasn't enough he had to ruin me, and kill my wife! Now he's trying to frame me for something I didn't do. I'll kill him before—"

The small, skinny man lunged across the room toward Fletcher Halstead. Two of Gentry's men had him before he had gone two steps. Howell struggled in their grip. Shayne looked questioningly at Fletcher Halstead.

"I forgot," the bald financier said. "I mean, with Paul shot and everything else. I called Howell, I wanted to talk to him. There was a job I could use him for if he'd let me help."

"Help? Help *me?* What a joke!" Adam Howell cried. "The last time you helped me I lost everything and my wife killed herself!"

Halstead suddenly shouted. "Damn it, I warned you! I told you to sell out your shares before it was too late but you wouldn't listen to me! All right, you were a fool and lost everything! But that wasn't my fault!"

"If you hadn't manipulated that stock I wouldn't have had to sell! Sell at a loss, you said! Better than nothing, you said! But did you tell me you were the one who was doing the manipulating?"

Suddenly Will Gentry swore and raised his hand for silence. The bluff Chief of Police was red with anger. "All right! Now shut up, both of you. We know you don't like each other. Only we're here about a murder. Is that the weapon, Mike?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "I found it under the window."

Gentry looked at Howell. "You said you knew it and so did Halstead. How come?"

"Because it's my gun," Howell said simply.

Shayne blinked. "Your gun?"

Howell nodded. "You'd find out. I have a permit and it's registered to me. But Halstead knows it's my gun, too."

Gentry looked at him. "And I suppose it was stolen from you?"

"Yes, it was," Howell said. "Or, at least, it's been missing for a month or so. Halstead knew where I kept it in my room. He was in my room about a month ago. He and Vera came to call, some cock-and-bull yarn about some money of mine they'd found in their safe-deposit box. It was just a handout. I guess it was Vera's idea."

"You can bet it was!" Halstead snapped. "I don't help stupid fools!"

"Shut up!" Gentry roared. The gruff Chief looked at Howell. "Supposing your yarn to be true, who else could have stolen the gun?"

"Fifty people. I don't lock my door. I live in a one room flop now, and I didn't think I had anything to steal. Anyone who wanted to kill Halstead or Paul Brack would know me and know about my Luger."

"You're a big help," Gentry growled. "All right, take both of them out of here," the Chief instructed his men, "and keep an eye on them. We've got work to do."

For the next hour the police worked in the murder room. Gentry sent a man to check on the maid, Jessica. The ME examined the body and the fingerprint men worked over the window and the ground outside. The results were uniformly negative.

The Medical Examiner reported that death was from a single shot through the heart of the assistant Paul Brack. Caliber of bullet fitted the long-barrelled Luger. Ballistics would confirm, but it looked as if the gun Mike Shayne had found beneath the window was the murder weapon.

The fingerprint crew found no prints on the gun, no footprints on the hard baked ground beneath the window, and no clues in the bushes around the window. There were many fingerprints on the window and window sill. Too many. Most of them were smudged, and there were so many no single clear prints could be lifted.

The Medical Examiner's crew

took away the body of Paul Brack, Gentry's men spread out over the enormous grounds to look for any evidence of outside entry. In the house the people seemed to have gone into hiding. Left alone in the study of the big house, Will Gentry and Mike Shayne sat in the soft glow of the later afternoon sun.

Gentry chewed on the cold stump of a black cigar. "Someone really wants Halstead dead," he said. "If the fool had come to us earlier maybe Brack would still be alive."

Shayne frowned. "Maybe," he said.

"What does that mean," Gentry snapped.

Shayne rubbed the stubble on his gaunt chin. "Will, I've got two questions about this shooting. First, how could someone at that window possibly miss his intended target at that distance? And how could he hit the wrong target? It's a big room, but the distance from window to body can't be more than twenty-five feet! Even Lucy couldn't miss with a long-barreled Luger at that distance."

Gentry nodded his grizzled head. "All right, it sounds hard, I grant that. But Halstead says, or implies, that Brack stepped in the way just as the shot was fired."

"That's possible, Will, but damned improbable," Shayne said. "And, actually, Halstead is pretty confused about what did happen. He didn't say Brack stepped between him and the window. Just that he heard a noise and stood up behind his desk and walked out to the center of the room where Brack met him."

"You're saying that maybe the shot wasn't intended to kill Halstead at all?" Gentry asked. "If Brack was the intended corpse, what about those other two accidents and the bomb?"

"A cover-up maybe?" Shayne suggested. "A before-the-fact attempt to divert suspicion, send us off on a wild-goose chase looking for people with motives to kill Halstead?"

Gentry smiled. "The same old Mike, suspicious as ever, eh? But you're right. We'll do some deep checking into the past of Paul Brack. I don't much believe in accidental murder either. What was the second question, Mike?"

"The gun," Shayne said slowly. "It bothers me. There it was right near the window where no one could miss it. Why? Halstead admits he panicked and never thought of looking out the window, the killer wasn't pursued or scared off. So why drop the gun?"

Gentry snorted this time. He waved a gnarled hand and chewed on the unlighted stump of his black cigar.

"You know better, Mike. Killers panic easy. We're not dealing with a professional killer. You know how often a murderer panics just

from the fact of having shot someone."

"Agreed," Shayne nodded, "it happens often. But this time, Will, the gun was wiped clean. There were no fingerprints on the gun! That means that we have to believe that the killer took the time to wipe it clean, calmly, and then dropped it? It sounds phony, Will."

"Unless he wiped the gun first and used gloves," Gentry pointed out. "What are your alternatives?"

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "First, the killer dropped the gun purposely to involve Adam Howell. Maybe the killer knew Howell would be in the area—which means that the killer either knew Howell or knew Halstead had called Howell to meet him here."

"And second?"

"The killer was Howell or some other outsider. An outside killer would tend to take the gun with him, right? But someone inside the house would be afraid of a search when you got here, or perhaps even knew I was here and really expected an immediate search. So the outside killer dropped the gun to make it look like an inside job."

In the silence of the study, the afternoon sun low toward evening now through the opened window, Will Gentry chewed on his cigar stump. The bluff Chief took out a match and slowly began to light the cigar. Dark blue-white smoke filled the silent room.

"Or maybe it was an inside job and the killer dropped the gun because he really was afraid of a search," Gentry said.

"That could be, Will," Shayne admitted. "I think the gun question can wait. The real question is: Was Brack killed by accidnet when the shot was intended for Halstead, or was someone out to kill Brack?"

"And if the shot was for Halstead, was it intended to kill or just scare him? I still want to check the extortion angle, Mike. I don't think Halstead is telling us everything, and I'm going to put my men on the past of Brack, and on any possible extortion."

Shayne nodded. "I think I'll talk to the ex-wife, Doris. Halstead said she lives in Miami. I'll get her name now, and her address. I still don't like that gun under the window. It has the smell of

a frame-up of some kind. I'd like to know if Doris had access to Howell's gun, or if she knew Brack."

"You think she may be involved? Why?"

Shayne frowned, his gaunt face grim. "I don't know, Will. But there's something wrong with this case. Something very wrong."

V

ONLY THE LAST purple twilight was above Miami when Mike Shayne drove up to the apartment of Doris Boyle, ex-wife of Fletcher Halstead. The apartment house was a good one, but not first-rate. Shayne remembered Fletcher Halstead's house, and thought that Doris Boyle had probably come down in the world.

As he left his car and walked into the lobby he considered what Halstead had told him about his ex-wife. Doris had been married to Halstead for five years. The financier had caught her cheating with a man named Fred Boyle nine years ago and divorced her. He had married Vera Colt two years later, and Doris had married her lover, Fred Boyle.

Since then, as far as Halstead knew, Doris had broken with Boyle and was living alone in Miami. Halstead did not know for sure whether or not she had divorced Boyle, or exactly what she was living on. A quick call to his friend Tim Rourke at the *Miami Daily News* office gave Shayne the information that Doris and Boyle were divorced, that they had been for over two years.

Now, in the elevator, Shayne was thinking about the knowledge of Halstead's house and habits necessary to make the attempts on Halstead's life—or to fake them. Halstead himself had said that even after nine years Doris Boyle had that knowledge because Halstead had not changed his way of living one bit since Doris had lived with him in the big house. And Halstead was sure that Doris and Adam Howell knew each other.

He walked along the quiet corridor of the apartment building and knocked on Doris Boyle's door. There was no answer. Shayne waited, and knocked again. This time he heard movement inside the apartment. Light footsteps approaching the door.

A woman's voice spoke through the door. "Yes? Who is it?"

"Michael Shayne, Mrs. Boyle. I want to talk to you."

There was a silence. Then the voice answered coldly. "I don't know anyone named Michael Shayne."

"I can come back with the police, if you'd prefer that," Shayne said bluntly through the closed door.

The door opened. The woman who stood there was tall and slender. A dark-haired woman who

may have been beautiful once, but had aged now, her face coarse and lightly wrinkled with the flushed complexion of a person who drank. Doris Boyle stepped back and motioned Shayne to enter.

"Thanks," Shayne said drily, his eyes looking quickly around the apartment. It was a good apartment but on the shabby side, sparsely furnished, and with cheap pieces.

"What's all this about the police?" Doris Boyle said.

The tall, dark-haired woman had a strong, hard voice. She wore a pair of tight slacks and a man's shirt. A cigarette hung from the corner of her mouth, and her fingers showed the brown stains of nicotine.

"The police are usually interested in murder," Shayne said as he turned to face the woman.

Doris Boyle closed the door and stared at Shayne. "Murder?"

"At Fletcher Halstead's house."

Doris Boyle turned chalk-white. For a moment Shayne thought the hard-faced woman would faint on the spot. She swayed and caught hold of an end table. Then she slowly sat down, her eyes never leaving Shayne's face. Shayne sat down facing her across the drab living room.

Doris Boyle took a deep breath. "Who . . . who was murdered?" she asked.

"A man named Paul Brack, Halstead's assistant. Did you happen to know him?" Shayne said innocently.

For another moment the tall woman sat motionless and without making a sound. Then the color seemed to rush back to her face, and she laughed. It was a cold, ugly laugh.

"Brack? Who would want to kill Brack?"

"Then you did know him?" Shayne asked.

The detective had not overlooked either the laugh or the obvious relief of the Boyle woman when he had said it was Paul Brack who was dead. Doris Boyle had been afraid someone else had been murdered—somone she very much did not want dead. Now Doris regained her hard composure and shrugged.

"I never met Brack, if that's what you mean," she said. "He was after my time, but I've heard of him. From what I heard he was a first rate assistant and no more. Ink in his veins, no bad habits, loyal and devoted to Fletcher and the whole menagerie out there now. Who kills that kind of man?"

"You seem to know a lot about him."

"Why not? I'm interested in the affairs of my ex-husband," the woman said.

"Maybe interested enough to kill your ex-husband? Or maybe just scare him and get a little extortion money?" Shayne said bluntly.

"Kill Fletcher!! Don't be stupid! Why should I want to kill the goose—" Doris Boyle stopped.

The tall, hard woman stared at Shayne for a moment. Then a light seemed to come into her eyes. "Fletcher! You think Brack was killed by accident! That's right, isn't it? Someone is trying to kill Fletcher! Well now, that makes more sense."

Shayne watched her from behind the flat surface of his steely eyes. She seemed to be speaking honestly. There was the ring of truth to both her apparent desire to keep Fletcher Halstead alive, and her ignorance of the other attempts on Halstead's life. Still, it could be an act.

Doris Boyle looked like a woman experienced in day-to-day acting, and what simpler way to cover knowledge of events than to make a correct guess? Perhaps she had deduced that Flecther Halstead was in danger—or perhaps she had known because she was the attacker!

"Just where were you today, Mrs. Boyle? Say from about noon until four o'clock this afternoon?" Shayne asked.

"None of your damned business!" Doris Boyle snapped.

"It will be the business of the police," Shayne retorted.

The woman laughed. She stubbed out her cigarette in an ashtray crammed with cigarette butts, and immediately lighted another cigarette. She blew clouds of smoke in the dim room lighted by only a single standing lamp.

"You used that scare technique once too often, buster," she said. "The police can ask me themselves. Not that I'm hiding anything, you understand. I was driving around and swimming. Maybe people saw me, and maybe they didn't."

But Shayne was not listening now. He was looking at the ashtray filled with cigarette butts, and he was remembering the long wait he had had outside Doris Boyle's door. There were two kinds of cigarettes in the ashrtay—plain and filter-tipped. The filter-tipped cigarettes had lipstick on them, and Doris Boyle was neither wearing lipstick nor smoking filter-tipped cigarettes.

Shayne stood up abruptly and began to pace the room. "Do you have any ideas about who might want to kill, or scare, Halstead?" he asked, moving casually and imperceptibly toward the door into the bedroom.

"Try Adam Howell," Doris Boyle said.

"Why do you suggest Howell? Maybe you know something?"

"I know Howell hates my dear ex-husband's guts," Doris Boyle said. "And for good reason. They were partners in a deal, and Fletcher did some manipulating. It was on the shady side, so he couldn't tell Howell straight out.

Fletcher claims he warned Howell, but either Howell didn't believe him or figured Fletcher was just trying to con him. Anyway, Howell lost everything, and his wife walked out on him."

Shayne nodded as if this were all news to him. He was close to the bedroom door now. He turned as if to ask another question. Doris Boyle was smoking her cigarette calmly, her body relaxed as she waited for the next question. Suddenly, Shayne stepped to the bedroom door and flung it open.

There was a short scream.

Doris Boyle jumped up swearing like an infantry sergeant. But Shayne paid no attention to the Boyle woman. It was the woman in the bedroom he was looking at. The woman who had screamed with surprise when he flung open the door. A short, lithe, dark girl no more than twenty-five or so. A very frightened girl Shayne had never seen before.

Behind him, Doris Boyle had stopped swearing. Now the hard ex-wife spoke. "All right, Jessica, you might as well come out and meet this peeper."

VI

THE SMALL, DARK, frightened girl came from the bedroom. Mike Shayne saw that she was wearing what looked like a beach dress, and he had the impression that she wore a bathing suit under it. But it

was not her appearance that made him tug on his earlobe. It was her name.

"Jessica?" Shayne said. "Vera Halstead's maid?"

"I knew you were bright," Doris Boyle sneered.

Shayne looked at the frightened maid. "Did the police let you go?"

The maid, Jessica, nodded. "Oui, I am on the beach all the time. I do not hear the gun. I have the witness, *no?*"

"What are you doing here, Jessica?" Shayne said bluntly.

The pretty, dark-haired maid looked frightened again. She turned her eyes toward Doris Boyle. The hard-faced ex-wife of Fletcher Halstead shrugged now. She sat down, crossed her good legs, and lighted another cigarette as she looked up at Mike Shayne.

"All right, Shayne, so I've been checking up on Vera. Why not? Fletcher threw me out because he caught me with Boyle. I figure old

Vera was no angel and maybe I could catch her at some hanky-panky. Hell, who knows what I wanted except that I wanted something to help me get back with Fletcher. It's funny, you know, but I really love the guy. Sure, the money's nice, but I really want the guy back. How about that? Me!"

Shayne scratched his chin. "You hired Jessica here to spy on Mrs. Halstead?"

"That's right. I paid her. It wasn't hard to get her help," Doris said.

Shayne looked at the maid. "You spied on your mistress?"

The girl was shaking, but there was defiance on her pretty young face. She, too, had lighted a cigarette, a filter-tip, and now sat down, her shapely legs swinging.

"She is a bad woman," Jessica said. "Oh, she pretend to be so nice, but she is bad. I know. I see what she do all the time, but Mr. Halstead he don't see."

"What did you see?"

"She laugh at him! Behind his back she all the time laugh at him. Why should I not help Mrs. Boyle. I think she is better for him."

"And it paid, too," Shayne said drily.

He looked at the Boyle woman. "Where did you get the money to pay Jessica?"

Doris Boyle laughed again. "Have you looked good at this dump? I had some money when Boyle and I split, and I've got a job. I live in this crummy apartment so I can use the money for more important things."

"Like getting Halstead back by hook or crook?"

"That was the idea," Doris Boyle said.

"You want him back very badly?" Shayne said.

"I guess I do."

"So much that if you can't get him one way, you'll try another? Like scaring him?"

"If I thought it would work. But Fletcher doesn't scare easy."

"No," Shayne said, "and maybe you want him so much that if you can't have him you'd kill him!"

"No!" the Boyle woman snapped, angry as she leaned forward toward Shayne.

"I've seen it before. Love and hate. 'There is no rage in heaven like love to hatred turned!' Right?"

"Wrong!" Doris Boyle snapped. "For kids, young lovers! Not for an old warhorse like me. I want my man alive and paying!"

Shayne watched her. Again her words had the ring of truth. It fitted her character. Doris Boyle had been around, as the saying went, and Shayne doubted that she would want a dead ex-husband. Still, you never could tell about spurned and jealous women.

"What did your money get you from Jessica?" Shayne asked.

Doris Boyle smiled. "I was wondering when you'd get to the point. Yeh, I got something for my mon-

ey. Old Vera had a lover, all right. Tell him, Jessica."

Shayne turned to watch the dark-haired maid. Jessica's pretty face was angry. She puffed on her cigarette and her leg swung in agitation where it was crossed over her other knee. She seemed to be seeing something in her mind.

"For a long time I was not sure," Jessica said. "I suspected, but I was not sure. I would see her prepare herself so carefully to be pretty when she was going only to a lunch with her women friends. I would see her excited, nervous, the way a woman is excited only when there is a man. She is not young, that woman. I know what care she must take of her face, and I see the difference between when she really goes to the women and when it is the man I suspect. But I cannot be sure.

"Then I know. One day she goes to a committee meeting with her friends, but she does not go. Her friends call and ask for her. No one is home but me, she knows that, she is careful. But I am home and I take the call and I know she is cheating on Mr. Halstead. Once, twice I try to follow but I cannot go too close, and she is very careful, very clever. But once I see the man.

"It is too far away, I cannot know who he is. Just a man I see her meet in a *bistro,* and then they go quickly, vanish, and I cannot follow. But now I know she is cheating. I try to catch the man when he calls, but that is funny, he does not call. I cannot understand how they—what do you say?—arrange the meetings. But I know now she is very bad woman."

"And you reported this to Doris here?" Shayne said.

The maid nodded. *"Oui,* I tell Mrs. Boyle. I call her when Mrs. Halstead is going out and I think with the man."

"You followed her?" Shayne asked the Boyle woman.

"I sure did. I spotted the man two, maybe three times, but I didn't recognize him. I never could get close enough to get a picture or hear anything that would tell me who he was. I'm still working on it."

Shayne tugged slowly on his earlobe. "Who else knows? Does Halstead know?"

Doris Boyle frowned. "I don't think so. Fletcher can get pretty violent about cheating. He caught me once and you see what happened to me. Once! And I was out on my ear. I didn't really give a damn for Fred Boyle, but I was caught so I married him. Just once and he threw me out!"

"What about Anna, the daughter?" Shayne said. "Or Brack?"

"Brack might have known, but I doubt it," Doris Boyle said. "He was so damned loyal to Fletcher he would have told him right away. Jessica thinks that Anna knows for sure."

Jessica nodded. "I think Miss Anna knows as I do, but not the man himself."

"Wouldn't she tell Halstead?" Shayne asked.

Doris Boyle shook her head slowly. "Maybe, she likes him a lot from all I hear, but I guess she feels she has to be loyal to her mother. Kids are funny."

"Wouldn't she be just as loyal to her father?" the detective asked, frowning.

Doris Boyle blinked. "Her father? You mean Fletcher? He isn't Anna's father. Anna is Vera's daughter, not Fletcher's! I was Fletcher's first wife, Shayne, and I only married him fourteen years ago! Fletcher is Anna's stepfather."

Now it was Shayne's turn to be surprised. "But she seems so close to him."

"They are very close, Mr. Shayne," Jessica said. "More than many real fathers and daughters. But Mrs. Halstead is her mother."

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe. He was beginning to get a strange idea.

"So Halstead would hate to lose Anna by divorcing Vera. And Anna would probably hate to see Halstead hurt. You're both sure you don't know who the man is?"

"No," Doris Boyle said, "damn it. But I will. And Shayne, while you're thinking about who wouldn't want to do what, think about how Vera would hate to be divorced! She and Anna both would be out in the street."

Shayne stood up. "You both better stay put. The police will want to talk to you. Jessica better get back to Halstead's house."

"I will," Jessica said.

"And I'm going no place," Doris Boyle said grimly.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE left the drab apartment. As he rode down in the elevator, he thought about Vera Halstead's unknown lover, and about Anna Halstead. He also thought about Adam Howell and the stolen Luger. It was Howell he wanted to talk to now.

If Doris Boyle's apartment had been drab, Adam Howell's single room was a dungeon. Shayne parked in front of the shabby rooming house in a dark section of Miami and climbed two flights of stairs to Howell's room.

The small, wiry man was at home. Howell was also half drunk. He swayed a little and waved at the bottle as Shayne came in.

"Join my friend and me," Howell said. "You might find a glass on the sink."

The night outside the uncurtained single window of the dismal room was pitch dark now. Shayne got the glass and poured out a small shot of the cheap bourbon. He sat facing Howell and pretended to drink the bad whisky.

"The police let you go?"

Howell laughed. "For now. They got an eye on me. I figure they want me to hang myself. Maybe I will."

"You still say the Luger was stolen?" Shayne said.

"I still say, peeper. You can believe me or not. Who cares."

The small, wiry man poured another massive shot of the cheap whisky. Howell drank in gulps like a man determined to get blind drunk.

"Let's say I believe you," Shayne said. "You said almost anyone could have stolen it?"

"Sure," Howell nodded. "I kept it in the holster in the top drawer of my bureau. I only got one. There ain't many places to hide a gun around this trap. I do some bonded messenger work for a living. That's why I go it."

"Do you know Doris Boyle?" Shayne asked.

"The ex-wife? Sure. A hard-nose, that one, no better than she oughta be but honest. I'll give her that. She come around a couple of times to pump me. I figure she was out to get Halstead back. Why not, he's loaded. You know he has no relatives? Not one. I was his friend once. A good friend, yeh."

The drunken skinny man nodded to himself in the dark of the dismal room. Howell seemed to be remembering the good days when he had been Fletcher Halstead's friend.

"Was she here recently?" Shayne asked.

"Who?" Howell said, blinking.

"Doris Boyle."

"The Boyle woman? Yeh, she was here maybe a month ago too."

"So she could have taken your Luger?"

"I guess so," Howell said. "They all could. Halstead and that wife of his were here. I told you that. Anna showed up, too. I like Anna, she always liked me. She's a good kid except for the way she likes that step-father of hers. He don't deserve a good kid like Anna. She'd come up here to talk to me sometimes, just to talk, be nice, you know?"

"So they all could have stolen your gun?" Shayne said.

"Like I said, half of Miami could have. That butler, George, he drove Fletcher and Vera over here that day. Paul Brack came with Anna sometimes. He was al-

ways busy, going off somewhere, but sometimes he brought her and picked her up. He was the helpful kind, always running errands."

Shayne stood up, his bourbon only half finished. Adam Howell looked at the half-full glass. The skinny man shrugged.

"Too cheap for you, Shayne? Well, all the more for me, right?"

"Maybe you better stay sober, Howell. You're still in this pretty deep," Shayne said.

"Who cares? Maybe I wish I had done it," Howell said. "Only I wouldn't have hit Brack."

"Maybe you were drunk," Shayne said.

"Maybe, only you know I wasn't," Howell said. "Someone stole my gun. You want to know who and I told you it could have been almost anyone. Only remember, Shayne, Halstead himself was the only one hated me enough to want to frame me! Everyone knows we hated each other."

Shayne left the small, skinny man dreamily pouring himself another bourbon. On the street again, he got into his car and drove through the night to Miami Police Headquarters. He strode into the office of Police Chief Will Gentry. The Chief was alone, but the pile of papers on his desk showed that Gentry was not being idle.

"Any luck?" Gentry said.

"Maybe," Shayne said, and he sat down and told the Chief what he had learned about Doris Boyle and the maid Jessica. Gentry scowled when he heard about Vera Halstead having a lover. The Chief made no comment when Shayne told him what he had learned from Adam Howell.

"We already checked the gun out," Gentry said. "Howell's right about anyone being able to steal it. They all admit being in the room. But it's this boy friend of the wife that interests me, Mike."

"Motive?" Shayne asked.

Gentry nodded. "Yeh, motive. I've been busy, too. I checked on Paul Brack. We've got nothing on him, his past checks out clean as a whistle. Nobody ever saw him do anything suspicious, his books balance, and we can't find he had any shady dealings with anyone he might want to cover up. Only—"

"Only what, Will?" Shayne said, as his gruff friend hesitated in the silence of the office.

"Only he seems to have had a girl friend no one can identify! And he was putting regular amounts of money into a special bank account, not his regular account. Not a lot of money, but steady over the past year."

"So he's frugal, he saved," Shayne said. "Halstead said Brack was high paid."

"It could be," Gentry agreed, "but why the separate account? I've been going over the whole case in my mind, Mike, and it adds up rotten."

"How so, Will?" Shayne said.

"What did you find out that worries you?"

Gentry chewed on the stump of his cigar and swivelled slowly about in his chair. Far off down the dim corridors of the Police Headquarters building there was the sound of voices and people moving.

"I got to thinking about your questions," Gentry said. "About how anyone could hit the wrong man from that window, and about what the gun was doing there on the ground. Then I thought about those three other accidents that could have killed Halstead."

Shayne nodded. "I know, Will. I've thought about them myself. There's something decidedly phony about every one of them."

"Yeh," Gentry said. "Somebody knocks a slow-leak into Halstead's boat, and apparently forgets how good a swimmer the man is. I mean, someone supposedly knows Halstead's habits well enough to fix the boat at just the right time, and doesn't know Halstead is an expert swimmer?"

"And someone sets Halstead's bed on fire, but conveniently forgets, or doesn't know, that the butler calls Halstead early every Thursday without fail?" Shayne said. "Someone familiar enough with Halstead and the house to get in, set a fire, know Halstead won't wake up, and not know about the early calls on Thursday?"

"Sloppy and stupid," Gentry said. "You'd know a real killer would do a better job."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "The bomb going off accidentally *before* anyone got on the plane. A bomb that could only do real damage if the plane was in the air. And no sign of extortion or any other reason for anyone to want to scare or threaten Halstead."

Now Will Gentry stood up. He began to pace, stopped, and stood at the window looking out over the bright night lights of Miami. His back was turned to Shayne.

"Now you say Vera Halstead had a lover, an unknown lover," Gentry said. "And I found out that Fletcher Halstead was once a chemist! It's still his hobby. There's a room in the cellar of his house set up like a real laboratory."

Gentry turned. "A laboratory with all the chemicals, and the metal parts, for making a gunpowder bomb!"

The redhead looked up at his

friend Gentry from where he sat in the silent office, his lips set in tight lines. The Chief was obviously coming to the same conclusion that Shayne had arrived at.

"Halstead was alone in the study with Brack," Shayne said. "We all figured the shot came from the window, and someone out there dropped the gun as a frame. But we only have Halstead's word."

"I know," Gentry said. "We believed him without thinking because of the other attempts on his life! But as you say, they look as phony as an ad man's script! If no one was trying to kill Halstead, we would have had him as prime suspect for killing Brack!"

"He could have shot Brack," Shayne said, "and tossed the gun out the window! That would make a lot more sense than some other party panicking and dropping it just outside the window."

"With the motive: Brack was Vera Halstead's lover, and Halstead knew it!" Gentry snapped. "It fits like a glove, Mike, once we realized that the attempts on Halstead's life were faked! He faked them all himself!"

Shayne tugged hard on his ear. His face was a mask of concentration and his grey eyes had sharpened to steel points. "It sure looks like he could have—"

"Looks, hell! It's open and shut! Consider how badly they were faked just to be sure he didn't get hurt. He was never in any real danger!"

Shayne rubbed his chin. "No, he never was. As soon as we guess that he had a reason to kill Brack, the whole thing takes on just one shape. He set up the attempts on his life himself to have a cover for killing Brack. Just one thing, Will."

"What's that?" Gentry barked.

"We have to prove he knew Brack was Vera's lover, if Brack really was," Shayne said.

"Let's get out there and find out!" Gentry said grimly.

VIII

THE POLICE CHIEF led the way out of the office, along the corridors, and down to the street. Mike Shayne took his own car and followed Gentry's official car out of the city and along the thruway to Fletcher Halstead's big house. He was thinking hard about the web Gentry was weaving around Fletcher Halstead. It made sense. There was no doubt in Shayne's mind that the attempts on Halstead's life had been fakes, but there was still a big *if* to be resolved.

Shayne was thinking about that, and the obvious conclusion that Halstead had tossed the Luger out the window after shooting Brack, as he followed Gentry's car on the long drive toward the big house. He was also thinking about what Howell had said—that Fletcher

Halstead was the only one who had a good reason to want to frame Howell. He stopped thinking as they approached a curve in the road that led to the big house.

The curve was at the bottom of a steep hill on the dark road that joined the swanky area to the main thruway. It was a normally dark road, but now it was a blaze of headlights. Police cars were parked everywhere. A wrecking truck stood on the road, its dangling hook illuminated by the headlights.

Off the road, upright, but with its smashed nose buried in a small ditch, was a small black car. Shayne saw Gentry's car stop. The Chief got out and ran to the wreck.

Shayne stopped his car and ran after Gentry. He caught up with him just as the patrol car policeman began to explain what had happened.

"Brakes failed right at the bottom of the hill. Damned lucky it was at the bottom," the patrol car policeman said. "It was no accident, Chief. Joe there, on the wrecker, says someone knocked a hole and all the fluid drained out."

"Whose car is it?" Shayne said quickly.

"Mr. Halstead's car. He was down here mad as hell," the patrol car man said. "Yelling bloody murder about getting some protection. He says ninety-nine out of a hundred times only he drove that car. It's his private sports car."

Gentry jumped with surprise. "He wasn't the driver? Well, who the hell was in the car?"

"Mrs. Halstead," the policeman said. "She's okay, just shook up. Damned lucky let me tell you. I don't know how she made it."

"How come she was driving?" Gentry said.

"She said her car was out of order, and wouldn't start. So she took the sports car."

"Where is she now?" Gentry asked.

"Halstead took her back to the house to get some rest. She was only shook up."

Shayne had stopped listening. He was down in the ditch looking at the car. No brakes at all. He, too, wondered how Vera Halstead had survived. This 'accident' WAS not a poor job. This one looked like business. Shayne felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. Will Gentry looked down at him. The Chief was having the same thought.

"This one was a good one, for keeps!" Gentry barked. "Only Halstead wasn't in the car, Mike. Let's get up to that house and quick!"

Shayne nodded and returned to his car. He followed Gentry's car the rest of the way to the house and up the driveway to the door. The big house was dark except for a single light in the library. Gentry motioned for Shayne to follow him.

The Chief led the way around the house to the garage. Gentry

and Shayne both stood watching while Gentry's driver checked the big blue Chrysler that was Mrs. Halstead's car. The driver looked up.

"Carburator broken, Chief," he said. "I'd say it was tampered with."

There was no other car in the garage. The large black family limousine was missing. Gentry nodded to Shayne and the two men walked from the garage into the house. In the library, Anna Halstead looked up as they came in. The beautiful blonde girl looked tired, her young face drawn and distraught.

"Where's your father?" Gentry snapped.

"Daddy?" Anna said. "In his room, I think."

"And your mother?"

"She's lying down in the study. Daddy wanted her to rest and relax. She was so nervous after the accident she could hardly sit still. Daddy said she'd never sleep, so she's in the study watching television and resting."

Gentry looked at Shayne. Anna Halstead was watching them both. Now she burst out.

"Daddy could have been killed! When are you going to stop these attacks? When?"

'Soon, Miss Halstead," Gentry told her. "Where is your father's room?"

But the girl was almost in tears. "It's so terrible! Daddy's so worried now he's carrying his pistol! When are you—"

Gentry swore. "Quick! Where is his room! *Tell us!*"

Anna blinked. "Second floor, third door on the right. But I don't—"

Gentry did not wait to hear what the girl planned to say. Neither did Shayne. The two men raced up the stairs. As they neared the top they stopped and began to walk slowly and softly. A telephone rang somewhere nearby on the second floor. A single ring and then silence. Will Gentry motioned Shayne to be quiet and led the way down the dim hall.

Slowly they approached the third door on the right from the head of the stairs. Gentry listened at the door. There was no sound. The Chief threw open the door and passed inside. Shayne followed. The room was empty. A second door stood open. It led to the rear

staircase of the rambling house.

Gentry swore. "Take a quick look. He may have forgotten something."

"I doubt it," Shayne said, "he isn't that—"

"Look!" Gentry barked.

The Chief stood at the closet. He held a suit that had been shoved into the back of the closet on the floor. The arms of the suit jacket, and the trousers, showed dark grease stains.

"We better search the room!" Gentry said sharply.

Shayne stood there staring at the grease-stained suit. Then looked at the telephone. He turned and strode toward the open door that led to the rear staircase.

"Not now, Will! Hurry!"

"What?" Gentry cried, puzzled as he watched Shayne already beginning to run.

"Quick, Will!"

Shayne raced down the back stairs with Gentry close behind him. A moment later they were out of the house and in the large grounds of the mansion. The door out into the grounds had been open.

XI

MIKE SHAYNE moved like a great cat through the thick bushes and across the soft grass, with Gentry at his side. The Chief of Police had his pistol drawn.

The night was dark and silent. Nothing moved on the grounds of the vast estate except the two men creeping softly through the night. There was no moon and the night was pitch dark. Gentry muttered softly, but Shayne only motioned for silence. The gaunt detective moved steadily ahead through the trees and bushes toward the west wing where the study was.

Far off on the road there was the sound of passing cars. In the house itself a voice was singing. A high, female voice with a faintly metallic sound. The television set was on in the study. From time to time there was a clink of glass as if someone were drinking in the kitchen.

Shayne continued to lead Gentry through the trees and across the soft grass of the estate. They had almost reached the end of the west wing now. There was light in the study where Paul Brack had died, and the sound of the television.

Suddenly Shayne stopped and gripped Gentry's arm. He pointed ahead to a spot near the lighted study windows.

In the path of light from the windows Fletcher Halstead stood as if paralyzed. The tall, bald man was staring into a dark clump of bushes.

There was a pistol in Fletcher Halstead's right hand.

Shayne motioned to Gentry to get down, and the two men began to creep toward Halstead in the

cover of the trees and bushes. The tall man did not hear them. They were almost on top of him and still he did not seem to hear them. He was staring directly at something neither Shayne nor Gentry could see.

Then Halstead spoke.

"You! You won't—"

Halstead raised his gun higher, pointed it toward the dark bush area, his finger moving.

Will Gentry raised his pistol to shoot.

Shayne knocked Gentry's pistol from his hand and leaped toward Fletcher Halstead. His hurtling bulk crashed into the tall financier and the two men went down in a tangled mass of arms and legs.

The two shots rang out in quick succession at almost the exact instant that Shayne struck Halstead. But not quite the exact instant. The shots came a split second after Shayne had knocked Halstead down. Later, Shayne found the torn cloth of his jacket where one of the two bullets had grazed as he fell on top of Halstead. But at the instant of hitting the ground, he rolled and came up with his own pistol out.

Two more shots ripped the night from the dark of the hidden bushes.

Shayne kicked Halstead away, and rolled. He had been quick, but not quite quick enough. One bullet sang past and buried itself in the soft ground. But Halstead cried out in pain and clutched his shoulder to show where the other bullet had struck. By this time Shayne was firing at the dark shadows.

There was the sound of feet running away. The feet ran very fast toward the far side of the house and the garage. Voices shouted in the house now, and lights went on. In the light from a rear window Shayne saw the running figure. It was that of a small woman.

"Come on, Will!"

With Gentry beside him, Shayne ran in pursuit. They reached the corner of the house where the garage was. A policeman lay on the ground. Four more of Gentry's men were crouched and facing the opened door of the garage. Inside the garage the starter of a car ground and ground with a tearing sound in the night.

"It won't start, remember!" Shayne shouted. "Come on out with your hands up!"

For an answer, four shots ripped from the garage. The crouched police returned the fire with a fusillade of shots. There was a sharp scream, coughing, and a final moan from inside the garage.

Shayne jumped up and cautiously approached the garage. Gentry switched on the light.

Vera Halstead lay on the concrete floor in a pool of blood. Her eyes were closed. She had been hit four times. Her pistol lay beside her. Shayne bent down. She never opened her eyes, but her lips moved.

"Not . . . prison . . . no . . . almost . . . freedom!"

And Vera Halstead was dead. Shayne stood up.

"She forgot she'd wrecked the carburator in the car," Shayne said.

"She wrecked the carburator?" Gentry looked incredulous.

Shayne nodded. "And planted that greasy suit in Halstead's room. She planned and faked the whole thing, Will. I expect we'll even find evidence to make us think Halstead knew about Brack."

Halstead stood in the garage doorway, holding his arm tight to his chest, and looking down at the body of his wife. There was blood on his coat from his shoulder wound.

"Brack?" Halstead asked. "She and Brack? But why did she kill Brack?"

"He was probably taking money, a little polite blackmail, and, anyway, she may have been tired of him. It was your money she wanted, and her freedom," Shayne said. "I imagine what triggered it was Doris Boyle and Jessica. Vera probably found out that they had discovered her game with Brack, and she knew what you would do if you found out. She could have killed them, but she was shrewd enough to guess that too many people had found her out. It was simpler to kill you, Halstead."

The scream echoed in the dark night. They all turned. Anna Halstead stood there looking at her

dead mother. As they watched, the beautiful blonde girl fainted dead away.

Fletcher Halstead turned from his wife and ran to the fallen girl. He picked her up gently, oblivious to the pain of his wounded shoulder.

Shayne smiled as he watched. "We better get Mrs. Halstead out, Will," he said. "We're lucky, I doubt if we could have gotten her for more than the attempt on Halstead. Of course, Doris Boyle would probably identify Brack as the man she saw with Vera. But attempted was all she would have faced, I figure."

"I guess even attempted murder was too much for her," Gentry said as he motioned to his men to remove the body. "She got her freedom."

X

LATER, THE MORNING sun already high in the sky, Will Gentry closed his file and leaned back in his swivel chair behind his desk.

"You were right, Mike. It was Vera calling Halstead on the phone as we approached his room. He said she called him from the study on the house phone and told him she thought there was a prowler outside. He grabbed his gun and went running. Then she slipped out and waited in the bushes. We made it just in time. She had him cold."

"She would have shot him, then fired his gun, and claimed self-defense," Shayne said. "It was a hell of a good plan. She faked all those attempts on his life, and made them look like he had faked them himself! That was the first thing I didn't like, those faked attempts were just *too* bad. She wanted us to guess they were faked.

"With all the evidence pointing to Halstead faking them himself, and with her planted evidence of the suit, and that laboratory in his cellar, she expected us to draw the conclusion that Halstead was doing the faking and the killing.

"What we had, Will, was a *triple* cross. She was a clever woman. On the surface it looked like a case of someone trying to kill Halstead. When we want to work and looked below the surface it began to look like a case of Halstead planning it all to cover his murder of Brack and, ultimately, of Vera too. That was where we were supposed to stop. She would kill Halstead and claim he had come to kill her, and all our evidence was supposed to back her story."

Gentry smiled sourly. "It damned near did for me. I was sure Halstead had faked the attempts himself to cover his murders."

"She went the third layer down: she faked the attempts, and killed Brack, and *made it look like Hal-*

stead. It looks like a complicated plan, but it wasn't. It gave her the one thing she needed, that any killer wants—the chance to kill her victim in the open and not be suspected. Any *accident* to Halstead would have made us suspicious of her at once. The wife is always a suspect."

"But with me believing Halstead was trying to kill her, like in that car crash tonight, she could have shot him at Police Headquarters and I would have been sure it was self-defense! Lucky for us you tumbled, Mike. How the devil did you guess?"

Shayne smiled. "She went too far. She could have fixed the boat, but so could anyone. She could have started the firs, but so could anyone. The same went for the bomb, Brack's murder, and getting Howell's gun. Remember that she admitted it was her idea to visit Howell that time. It gave me an idea about her.

"But the car crash tonight was too much, she went too far. She wanted us to believe that Fletcher Halstead tampered with the two cars in order to kill her and make it look like someone had tried to kill him. But she made one mistake—she drove the car and was not hurt. I looked at that car, Will, and the way it had been fixed *no one could have come out unhurt unless that person knew the car was fixed and exactly how!*"

There was a silence in the office. Will Gentry chewed on his cigar and stared out the window. At last the Chief sighed and nodded.

"You're right. I must be getting old. Anyone barrelling down that hill, hitting that curve, and trying to brake without knowing the brakes were out would have been very lucky not to be killed. She had to know the brakes were out and plan for it."

"That's how it seemed to me. When I added that to the poor faking of the accidents, the laboratory in the cellar she as well as Halstead had access to, and my suspicion that Brack was the lover, I had her. Halstead couldn't have known about Brack. He would have thrown her out immediately, not killed her."

"A smart woman, but not smart enough. I feel sorry for that Anna, though. Vera was her mother."

"Halstead's her fahter," Shayne said. "I think she'll be all right."

Will Gentry nodded and Shayne waved as he left the Chief's office. As he reached his car, Mike Shayne wondered whether to get some sleep first or have a brandy. The brandy won.

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every issue.

The Society prized life so highly
. . . it made Death a lifetime member.

THE DEVIL'S OWN

by JONATHAN CRAIG

FOR A FEW moments, just before he'd left the meeting, the clutch of fear inside Courtney Hamilton III had been so strong that he'd thought he was going to be physically ill. Even now, more than two hours later, there were butterflies in his stomach, and the hands shoved deep into the pockets of the three-hundred-dollar topcoat trembled uncontrollably.

He quickened his pace, an unusually tall young man with his shoulders hunched against the slicing wind of the bitter November night, his footsteps the only sound in this dark and silent neighborhood of the very rich and their near-palaces, set far back of their protective shields of fieldstone wall and sculptured hedge.

Tomorrow, he reminded himself again, the two-year nightmare would be over. He'd picked up his passport and his Air France ticket today, and the final arrangements for the liquidation of his holdings and their transfer to the numbered account in Zurich would be completed in the morning before he boarded the plane.

Even his own street, when he came to it, seemed disturbingly unfamiliar. He had walked it uncounted times, and yet tonight an alien presence seemed to hover over the dark stretches of unlighted pavement and behind each sharp turn of wall. He lengthened his stride and walked even faster. Only another four blocks now, and he would be home. Then, with the enormous old mansion protected with as many warning and burglary devices as any bank, perhaps he could sleep.

Far down the street an upper-story window glowed, weak and remote, shrunken by the cold. That would be George Wingate's house, just beyond his own. He and George had gone to the meeting together, as they always did, but George had left half an hour earlier.

The meeting tonight had been like any of the two dozen others he had attended: almost a hundred madmen, banded together for an almost incredible purpose. He hadn't thought them mad when he had first joined them, of course. They had seemed to be men cut from the same rare cloth as he. Men of unquestioned honor and courage, and with that special awareness of the true relationship between life and death granted to only one individual in thousands.

But now, he knew, they were all madmen, and the only truth was terror.

It had all begun so casually, in the small bar next to the pro shop at the country club. He and George Wingate had had the place to themselves. George, a cadaverous multimillionaire in his early sixties, had an irritating habit of continually removng the pince-nez from his nose, examining them as if he had never seen them before, and then replacing them with slow and maddening precision.

"I've been thinking abut you quite a bit these past few weeks, Court," George had said, smiling thinly at the brimming shot glass on the bar in front of him. "I've come to a conclusion about you."

"Oh?" Court had said. "And just what is that conclusion, George?"

"It's that your life isn't worth the living. You might as well be dead."

"I see. Well, now, that's really quite a conclusion, isn't it?"

"Your life has no savor, Court. Admit it. Despite your health and wealth and youth, you don't live at all. You merely exist."

Court smiled. "You don't say."

"Oh, but I do. I do, most emphatically. To live, to be acutely conscious of how precious life really is, one must at the same time be acutely conscious of death. The one has meaning only in the presence of the other."

"You're suggesting that I ought to live more dangerously?"

"Yes. The unthreatened life is the meaningless life. Danger means awareness, and awareness means intensity. The meaning, the value, the preciousness of life increases in direct proportion to the danger of losing it."

Court sampled his drink. "I suppose that's true," he said. "I'd really never thought very much about it."

"That's why men drive racing cars and climb mountains and join weekend skydiving clubs," George said. "Only those activities aren't really satisfactory. They do the

job for an hour, a day, a week. But what a man really needs is constant danger. He must feel that his life is threatened from the moment he arises in the morning until he retires at night. In fact, he must be in danger even while he sleeps."

"Which would be impossible, of course."

"Not at all. Suppose I told you that there is a society in this city composed of men who have taken an oath to live always in just such constant danger?"

"Constant danger of what?"

"Of death. Each month, one member of the society will die. It is as certain as the monthly death of the moon. And just as a new moon takes the place of the old, so a new member takes the place of the one who has departed."

"When you say die, do you mean the member is killed? Murdered?"

"His time comes, and he dies—call it what you like. The society meets once each month. Each member writes his name on a small card in the presence of the Selection Committee—that's a permanent committee composed of the three oldest members—and drops the card into a large silver amphora. Later, the Committee draws out one of the cards. The name on that card, which is known only to the Committee, is the name of the man who is marked for death. His life may be terminated that same night, or three nights later, or on the last day of the month. But he will die."

"And the members of the society trust one another enough to—?"

"In order to become a member, one must be a man of honor. His word must be unchallengeable. He must be a man who, once he has taken the oath of membership, would die before he broke it." Wingate paused. "You are such a man, Court. I'm certain of it. Otherwise I wouldn't be telling you this."

Court moistened his lips. "Are you inviting me to join this society, George?"

"I'm inviting you to think about it. There are roughly a hundred members, so the chances of your card being selected at any given meeting would be, of course, about one in a hundred. Those would be long odds on almost anything—except life and death. But it would mean the difference between living and merely existing. Think about it, Court."

He *had* thought about it. And now, two years later, as he walked home through the frigid dark of this November night, he cursed the hour he had made his decision to join. But even more, he cursed himself for the fool he had been to continue, month after month, to honor an oath that he had made in what could only have been a state of temporary insanity. Twenty-three months. Twenty-three fel-

low members dead of gunshot wounds in the head—dispatched by the cool, skilled hand of an assassin whose identity, like that of his victim, was known only to the Selection Committee. Twenty-three months of terror.

He was only three blocks from his house now, and he saw that the light in George Wingate's upstairs window had gone out. Would George be able to sleep tonight? he wondered. Was life at sixty-odd any more or less sweet than life at thirty?

It was then that he heard the sound.

To someone else whose senses had not been honed to almost animal sharpness by two years of constant danger, the sound would have been inaudible. The sound of footsteps. Rubber or crepe soles and heels. A whisper of sound, barely perceptible, even to Courtney Hamilton.

He glanced over his shoulder. The man was about thirty feet behind him, walking fast. A big man, hatless, with his overcoat flapping open as if to flout the cold.

Was this it? Was the man behind him the society's executioner? Was he to be murdered within sight of his own home, only a few hours before he would have boarded the plane that would have taken him to Paris and safety?

Fifty feet farther on, he glanced back again. The man was gaining on him. As fast as Hamilton was walking, the man was walking faster.

There was a way to find out whether the man behind him was the assassin. Cross the street. If the other man followed him across, then—

He crossed the street almost at a run. And now there was no further doubt. The man behind him was crossing the street too, and crossing it faster.

"Hold it," the man's voice said, just as Hamilton reached the far curb. It was a thin voice, flat, completely without emotion.

Court Hamilton stopped, his legs suddenly almost too weak to support him. "Listen—" he said, and then saw the gun in the man's right hand and could say no more.

"Over there against the wall," the man said, almost casually. "In that big shadow there."

Hamilton took three faltering steps to the wall and let his shoulders sag against it.

The man raised the barrel of the gun an inch. "Turn around," he said.

No, Court Hamilton thought. God, no.

"Turn around, I said," the man repeated, a little more sharply.

Hamilton turned slowly and pressed his forehead against the icelike stone of the wall.

"Now get your billfold out," the man said. "Real slow and easy like. All it takes with me is one false move, buddy."

"A—a stickup?" Hamilton said incredulously.

"What'd you think? Get that leather out."

He took the wallet from his pocket, moving very slowly.

"Drop it on the ground and start walking," the man said. "The same direction you were before. You look back, or yell, or start running, and I'll drill you through the head. Now, move."

Court Hamilton turned and began to walk. There was rubber in his legs; he couldn't have run if he'd wanted to. When he reached the corner, he looked back in spite of himself. The street was as empty as before. There was cold sweat on his forehaed, and he brushed it away with the back of his hand. Don't think, he told himself. Don't think about anything at all. Tomorrow it'll all be over. Tomorrow you'll be on the other side of the ocean, four thousand miles from here. Tomorrow—

Behind him, back at the intersection he had crossed only moments ago, a car's tires squealed as the driver took the corner too sharply. Powerful headlights bored through the night in a wide arc as the car, still hugging the corner, straightened out and came on. And then, just before it came abreast of him, it slowed. A big car, Hamilton saw from the corner of his eye. A long, dark sedan with a kitten-purr engine. A Rolls-Royce; the radiator grill was unmistakable.

The car was moving slowly, pacing him. The assassin? But in a Rolls? Would a killer use such an easily identifiable car? No. But then it could have been stolen, to be driven a few blocks to where the killer's own car was waiting.

The Rolls drew even with him, edging ever closer to the curb.

Run, you fool! Hamilton told himself. But he could not. He could only stand there, his fear-numbed legs rooted to the sidewalk.

The window on the passenger side of the front seat was going down. He had to run, he *had* to.

A face appeared in the open window. A girl's face, very young, framed by a sequined matilla.

"Sir," she said, "which way is Coachman Road?"

"Oh, God," Court Hamilton breathed.

"Sir?" the girl said.

His mouth was dry, his tongue seemed swollen to twice its normal size. "Stra—straight ahead. Four blocks," he managed.

"Thank you," the girl said. The window went up and the car moved away, accelerating rapidly and soundlessly.

He watched the taillights until they disappeared. Then, once again, he began to walk—but slowly now, wincing against the hot wires of pain that had suddenly replaced the numbness in his legs, as frostbitten flesh seems to sear when warmed by fire.

Another block and a half. A long way. An almost impossibly long way. He was tired as he had never been tired before. He needed rest; but he trudged on, forcing himself to take one step after another, driven by an urgency too strong to deny and too instinctive to comprehend.

From far across the city a siren keened, a thin, eerie rise and fall of sound that stopped as abruptly as it had begun. Then nothing but the black silence again, and the cold bite of the wind against his face.

A block now. Counting the steps. A block. A long way.

"Good evening, Court," a man's ready voice said from five feet away.

He froze, his eyes jerking wildly to the shadowed recess in the high fieldstone wall to his right.

He hadn't recognized the voice, and for a moment he didn't recognize the face, half-buried as it was in the upturned collar of a heavy overcoat.

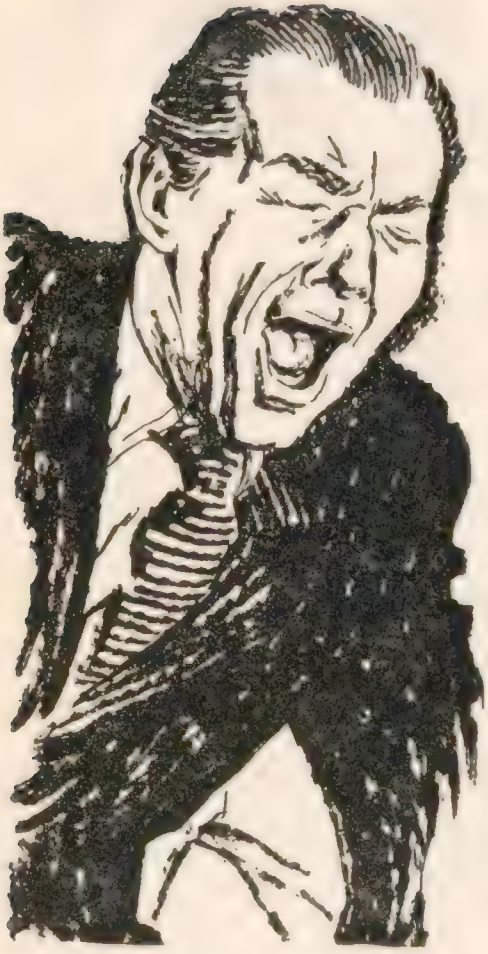
The man laughed nervously. "It's Marvin Evans, Court," he said apologetically. "I seem to have startled you. I'm sorry."

"Marv!" Hamilton said. And then his surge of relief faded abruptly as he realized the significance of the man's presence here. Marvin Evans was a member of the society, a short, painfully shy milquetoast of a man, the kind of man whose membership in such an organization had always seemed to Courtney Hamilton to be almost unbelievable.

But he had never been more wrong in his estimation of a man, Hamilton knew now. This was no chance meeting; it couldn't be. Marvin Evans lived on the far side of the city, in Crestwood. He could be here, at this hour and in this cold, for only one purpose.

Evans' right hand and wrist were buried beneath the left lapel of his overcoat. There was a gun in that hand, Hamilton knew. Any second now Evans would draw it out and kill him, just as he had killed so many others.

He was staggered by the incongruity of the society's assassin. Of all the members—of all the men in the city—Marvin Evans was the last one he would have suspected. Marvin Evans! The idea was so completely absurd that he felt the silent laughter choking his throat. He knew then that he must be mad, because he wanted nothing in the world so much as to laugh aloud.



To laugh and keep on laughing, right up to the instant Evans pulled the trigger.

But why was Evans hesitating? Why didn't he draw the gun and do what he had come here to do? Why this sadistic wait? Was Evans enjoying this moment, relishing a doomed man's terror?

"Do it," he heard himself say. "Do it, Marv. Get it over with."

Evans stared at him for a long moment, and then took a slow, hesitant step toward him.

"Do it!" Hamilton said. "What are you waiting for?"

"Are you drunk, or what?" Evans said softly. "What's the matter with you, Court?"

"That pistol under your coat. Don't you think I know what it's for?"

"Pistol?" Evans said. "Pistol, Court?" He withdrew his hand, and with it a diminutive chihauhau. The dog squirmed in his hand, trying to worm its way back inside the warm coat.

"I wouldn't exactly call Senorita Dolores a pistol," he said. "Even if she isn't much bigger than one." He slipped the dog back inside his coat. "I invited her out to share my constitutional. But it was a bit too cold for a lady with such a thin fur coat, and so I was forced to provide her with a little heated taxi service."

Evans seemed ill at ease, anxious to be on his way. "Well, I'm weekending with friends over on Beaumont," he said. "Perhaps I'd better be getting back. Good night, Court."

Court Hamilton said nothing.

"I don't believe I'd drink any more tonight, if I were you," Evans said, and walked off in the direction from which Hamilton had just come.

And now the clogged laughter in Hamilton's throat finally broke loose. It came in short bursts at

first, and then in a rush. He leaned against the wall and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks and he had to gasp for breath. Down the sidewalk, Marvin Evans glanced back at him, shook his head, and hurried on.

When at last Court Hamilton pushed away from the wall and started once again for his house, he felt better than he had felt in the whole of the two years since he'd joined the society. The muscles in his legs were lithe and strong, and the terror that had cramped his stomach and dried his mouth was gone. The laughter had done that for him; it had purged his fear completely.

Tomorrow night I'll be in Paris, he reminded himself happily as he started up the steps to the portico of his house. A Pernod. My first drink in Paris will be a Pernod. And then a couple of those little stilt-stem glasses of absinthe—that special pale-green absinthe in that cellar club in the Rue—

From behind the portico column nearest the door stepped Courtney Hamilton's elderly friend and neighbor, George Wingate. In the shadow, his face was skeletal, and the lenses of his pince-nez seemed opaque, as if he were staring at Hamilton through milky discs.

Hamilton heard the sharp intake of his own breath, even as he managed somehow to force a sickly grin.

"You oughtn't to suddenly materialize out of nowhere like that, George," he said. "You gave me quite a start."

Wingate spoke woodenly, as if he had rehearsed the speech many times. "I hate like the devil to tell you this, Court," he said, "but the Selection Committee drew your name at the meeting tonight."

Good old George, Hamilton thought. "Don't let it worry you," he said. "I'm leaving the country tomorrow, George. I was waiting until in the morning to say goodbye, but—" His voice trailed off, and he stood looking at his friend until the older man lowered his eyes.

"But how could *you* know it was my name they drew?" Hamilton asked. "Only the Selection Committee and the assassin would know that."

George Wingate nodded slowly. "Yes," he said. "Only the Selection Committee—*and* the assassin."

The revolver Wingate drew from his overcoat pocket was fitted with a silencer. He fired four times, very rapidly. The shots did not sound like shots; they sounded like a small child coughing under a blanket in the next room.

A NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

It was so unusual a crime
it could only be solved . . .
by upside-down logistics.

HINK-DINK

by FLETCHER FLORA

I WAS AMUSING myself by concocting hink-dinks. I hasten to add, however, that this trifling entertainment was supplemented by a good cigar and a strong drink.

Do you know what a hink-dink is? Let me explain. Suppose that someone puts to you this question: "What is a corpulent rodent?" It then becomes your task to respond with a pair of one-syllable words that rhyme. For example: "A corpulent rodent is a fat rat." The response is a hink-dink.

This little game is surely not comparable as an intellectual exercise to chess, or even anagrams, but I make no apologies for it. It imposes no burden on the surfeited mind, and it amuses. Besides, if one does not object to talking to himself, so to speak, it can be played alone. Moreover, although I didn't anticipate it, it served in this instance to prepare me for Detective Lieutenant Jesse Risen, who brought me a puzzle that was to prove a greater challenge.

Risen, as you may remember, consults me whenever he is frustrated by one of the knottier problems of his difficult trade. He does not do this candidly, but always sustains the fiction that it is merely to give me the pleasure of trying my wits. I do not object to this childish self-deception, however, for I understand that it is essential to his pride. The truth of the matter is, I am quite fond of Risen. He is always welcome in my house, even when he drops in unexpectedly, as he did this particular evening.

I put him in his favorite chair in my study and gave him a glass of his favorite drink, which is bourbon and water. I could tell immediately from his deliberate composure, designed to conceal exactly what it revealed, that he had been impelled to come by something urgent and troublesome. He is seldom impelled to come, indeed, by anything less. Picking my brains is his customary procedure in emergencies.

Not, you understand, that he is completely devoid of aptitude for his job. On the contrary, within his limitations, he is quite proficient. I can always rely on him for meticulous and detailed information gathered in his criminal investigations, and it is thus possible for me to make certain deductions which are invariably, to say the least, helpful.

Now, stretching his legs and taking a generous swallow of his drink, he looked at me from the corners of his eyes with a sly expression that seemed to challenge me to guess his mission. It is a fact that Risen becomes the more sly as his purpose is the more apparent, an amusing characteristic as detectable as a tic, and I lost no time in taking up the challenge.

"Well, Risen," I said, "have you laid hands on the murderer of James Hoagland?"

I was assured by the way in which his slyness quickly soured that my question had squarely hit the mark.

"I see that you've been reading the papers, Roscoe," he said ungraciously.

"Certainly. I always read the papers. It's a habit of mine."

"What do you know about James Hoagland?"

"Just what I've read. Are you prepared to enlarge my knowledge?"

"I admit that there is something about this case that has put you in my mind," he said. "It involves a little problem that is exactly the kind of thing you like to play with."

"Indeed? What problem, exactly?"

"A locked room."

My eyebrows shot up, and Risen looked uncomfortable, which has with him the effect of making him look surly.

"Oh, come, Risen," I said. "This is too much."

"You may be as skeptical as you please, but it's the truth. I'd better fill you in on the details."

"I think you'd better."

"As you know from the papers, James Hoagland was murdered about ten o'clock last night in his bedroom. His head was bashed in with a small stone figure that he kept on a table in the room. The figure, quite worthless as a source of fingerprints, was found on the floor beside his body. What you don't know, since it has not been printed, is that the bedroom was thoroughly secured on the inside. There is one door leading to the hall. It was bolted. All windows were fastened. There is a bathroom accessible only from the bedroom. It has one small window, which was also fastened. That's all. There is absolutely no other way to leave that room. No air ducts, no trap door, no anything. Yet, someone did kill Hoagland and leave. How?"

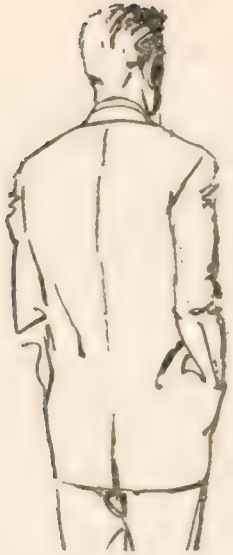
"Risen, you are a hopeless mass of contradictions," I said. "With one breath you say that no one could have left the room, and with the next you inform me that someone did. Even you should recognize the absurdity of such a position."

"Oh, I know. I expected you to assume a superior attitude, but I notice that you have no solution."

"As for a solution, it's a bit early yet. Patience, Risen. I warn you, however, that I will not be flimflammed by a fake complication that you may have lifted from some obscure novel. Tell me directly if this is a genuine problem or not."

"It is! By God, as my name is Roscoe Fey, I swear it is! I've given you the facts exactly."

"Very well. I accept your assurance. For the present, I think, we have had enough of purely material factors. Tell me, please, about the people involved. Who lives in the house? Who discovered the body, and what were the circumstances?"



Risen stared down into his empty glass, clearly reluctant to begin his distressing account without the refurbishment of bourbon, and so I took his glass and filled it, waiting afterward while he restored himself and gathered his thoughts.

"To begin," he said finally, "there was James Hoagland himself. In his early sixties, he was hopelessly paralysed. Just his legs, I mean. The doctors could do nothing about it. He spent most of his later life in his wheel chair and his bed. An elevator had been installed so that he could move readily from the first to the second floor, where his bedroom was, and vice versa."

"He was, I understand, quite wealthy."

"That's right. He wasn't always paralysed, and in earlier days he had added materially to a considerable inherited fortune."

"I see. You are doing famously, Risen, as usual. Please go on."

"I'll be glad to, if you will only give me the chance." Risen rewarded me with one of the surly glances I always receive for praise freely offered. "Besides Hoagland, there are his wife, a brother and his wife, a widowed sister and her son, Hoagland's nephew."

"Nephew?" I could not resist retaliating to his graceless treatment of my praise. "Yes, I suppose that's logical. However, I'm interrupting again. There are servants, of course?"

"Yes. A married couple, named Swift, who have a room on the third floor. A yard man who lives out and comes in by day. His name is Carter. Hoagland's brother, by the way, takes care of Hoagland's affairs. His name is Peter, and he is well paid for his work. In addition, I am told, he is of independent means. The sister's name is Owen. Blanche Owen. The son is about thirty, I'd say. Unmarried. His name is Frank."

"Do you know the disposition of James Hoagland's fortune?"

Risen nodded. "Roughly. There doesn't seem to be anything unusual about it. His widow will receive the lion's share, of course. Peter and his wife will profit least, since they have the least need. No need at all, to be exact. Mrs. Owen and her son will be remembered

generously, I'm sure. It's my job to look for a money motive in a case of this kind, naturally, but I'm inclined to doubt very much that there is one."

"One can never be really sure, can one?" I said. "Well, we'll see in good time. Meanwhile, I'd like to know as accurately as possible just what occurred in the house last night, and what you discovered when you arrived."

"There's little enough to tell, and that's a fact," Risen replied. "They had an early dinner, and the Swifts had finished their tasks and gone to their room on the third floor by eight-thirty. Hoagland, the Peter Hoaglands, and Mrs. Owen played bridge in the library until nine o'clock, when everyone but Hoagland pleaded tiredness and went off to their respective rooms on the second floor.

Hoagland remained alone in the library to read for about an hour, and then went up to bed himself, using the elevator, of course. The time is known pretty accurately, although no one actually checked his watch, because the elevator makes a humming noise that can be heard all over the house."

"Where was the nephew? Frank, I believe you said his name was."

"Yes. I was coming to him. He had an engagement with a young lady, and went off to keep it shortly before eight. Her name, for the record, is Adela Armour. It has a

phony sound, and I thought at first that it might have been assumed because Miss Armour was some kind of performer. But it wasn't, and she isn't. I've talked with her."

"And she verifies the engagement?"

"Oh, yes. Nothing wrong there. She and Owen had planned to go out to dinner and a club, but instead they stayed home. In her apartment. It seems that she had a severe headache, and so they made it a quiet evening. Owen left shortly before eleven and got back to the Hoagland house shortly after."

"He was, I believe, the one who discovered Hoagland's body?"

"That's right," Risen said. "He was the one."

"How did it happen, precisely?"

"On the way to his room, while passing Hoagland's, he noticed a crack of light below the door," Risen said. "This struck him as slightly out of order, for Hoagland was usually asleep at that hour, and he paused to knock on the door. He repeated his knocking two or three times without getting a response, and then he

became alarmed. He did not suspect murder, of course. But after all Hoagland was an invalid, and Owen thought that he might have suffered another stroke or something of the sort.

By this time, Peter Hoagland, roused by the knocking had joined Frank outside the door, and they broke into the room together. They found the body on the floor by the bed. The wheel-chair was in a position to indicate that Hoagland had rolled himself up to get the pajamas that Swift had laid out for him. That was when he was struck over the head by someone who came up behind him. Incidentally, the noise roused the others, and they naturally came to see what was going on."

"The door, you say, was bolted on the inside?"

Risen nodded. "I did. Securely. The metal plate on the door was ripped loose, but the one on the jamb was still in place, although partially loosened, and the bolt was still hanging from it."

"You're positive that there could have been no hocus pocus from the outside?" I asked. "No trickery with wire or fine cord or such?"

"Absolutely," Risen assured me. "Not with that bolt. The door had an ordinary lock, of course, but it was old and faulty and never used. Even the key has been lost."

"Did Hoagland customarily lock himself in his room at night?"

"So I'm told. People with physical handicaps often, I believe, do such things. It compensates somewhat for their feeling of helplessness. His wife, however, had urged him not to do so in case he became ill in the night and needed help."

"All right. Continue with your account."

"There's nothing more of significance to tell you. The room, as I've made clear, was completely secured on the inside. Yet someone murdered Hoagland and left the room without disturbing the security. Surely you are prepared to tell me how it was done."

His remark could hardly be called irony. Too heavy and more than a little offensive, it was crude sarcasm. Getting up to fill my glass, I was prompted by pique to leave his empty, but I am incapable of violating the rules of hospitality in my house, and so I took his glass and refilled it too.

"Risen," I said, resuming my seat, "you have permitted yourself to become addled by an appearance of the impossible. One thing certainty should be held firmly in mind in these little affairs. If a thing is done, it is possible. If the bolt on Hoagland's door was secured, it was secured through human ingenuity from the outside."

"What the devil do you mean?" Risen demanded, becoming slightly angry. "I may be addled, as you say, but you are clearly hedging."

"On the contrary, I am prepared to give you a little demonstration

that may prove instructive. First, however, I'd like to know a bit more about that bolt. It obviously could not have been slipped into place by anyone inside the room, and I have your assurance that it could not have been done with string or wire by someone outside. I am fascinated by this bolt, Risen. Describe it."

"It was just an ordinary barrel bolt," he said.

"Was it equipped with a chain?"

He shook his head. "No chain. Just a larger plate containing the bolt and a smaller plate, fastened to the jamb, into which the bolt slipped."

"What was its condition?"

"Well it was somewhat damaged, of course, when I examined it. After all, the door had been forced."

"Did it, in spite of the damage, look as though it would have worked easily before the door was forced?"

"There's no question about it," Risen said. "As a matter of fact, it had just recently been oiled. It would have slipped through the loops of the plates as smoothly as cutting butter."

"Now, Risen. One question more. What was the bolt made of?"

"Steel. Good hard steel."

Having had the precise answers I had anticipated, I set my glass aside and stood up and crossed to my desk on the far side of the room. I opened the bottom drawer on the right side, in which I keep a miscellaneous collection of small objects that I have found amusing from time to time. Rummaging, I found what I was looking for—a pair of tiny metal dogs. Call them toys, if you like. I have already confessed, I believe, to a certain simplicity of taste in entertainment. Carrying the toys, then, I returned again to my chair.

"What have you got there?" Risen asked.

"Toy dogs, Risen. Rather vulgar, I'm afraid. One of them has the chronic inclination to sniff the other in a private place. Never mind, however. Just watch closely."

Clearing a small table beside my chair, I set one of the dogs on the surface. Then I held the other dog firmly against the underneath side, directly below the first, and moved it slowly. As the dog below moved, so moved the dog above. In unison, they moved slowly across the table and, reversing direction, back again.

"Oh!" said Risen. "Oh, by God!"

"Precisely, Risen," I said. "If these little magnets are capable of such tricks, what tricks could a much stronger one perform on a steel bolt through a door that is surely little thicker than this table top? Especially, Risen, if the bolt had been carefully oiled and otherwise prepared for the trick?"

"By who?"

Risen's voice was as shaky as his grammar. I could hardly repress a smile of satisfaction, but I managed to mind my manners.

"I can hardly give you all the answers, Risen," I said. "I can, however, make a suggestion. Motives, you must remember, are commonly prosaic, once they are detected. Say that you are an unscrupulous young man with an expensive girl. Say that you are also heir to a considerable part of a fortune. There is surely the stuff of murder. In fact—"

"You're forgetting something, aren't you?" Risen interrupted. "It happens that the young man was in the apartment of the young lady when the murder was done."

"Oh, come, Risen. The alibi strikes me as being patently prepared. Haven't you ever heard of collusion? I am only speculating, but I'll wager that he never left the house until later. Was he actually seen leaving? You didn't say so.

"It would have been a simple matter to wait in his uncle's room, conceal himself in a closet or the bathroom when his uncle came up to bed, and step out to murder when the chance presented itself. Then he had only to employ his magnet, slip away to his girl's apartment, perhaps to report progress thus far, and return after a while to go through the discovery bit. The magnet, of course, has been disposed of, but you may be able to trace its purchase."

Risen set his glass aside and stood up. He moved with a deliberation that suggested a trance, and his eyes were fixed glassily.

"We'll see!" he said. "Oh, by God, we'll see!"

It was the expression with which he acknowledges enlightenment, and it reached me over his shoulder as he headed for the door.

"One moment, Risen!" I said. "Restrain yourself, please. I would like to advise before you go that you approach this matter indirectly. In other words, through the young woman who has laid herself open to a most serious indictment. She may be grateful for a way to alleviate it. You'll be surprised, I'm quite certain, at the results."

Question: What is a calculating female when dealing with a tough cop?

Answer: A cool stool pigeon, that is.

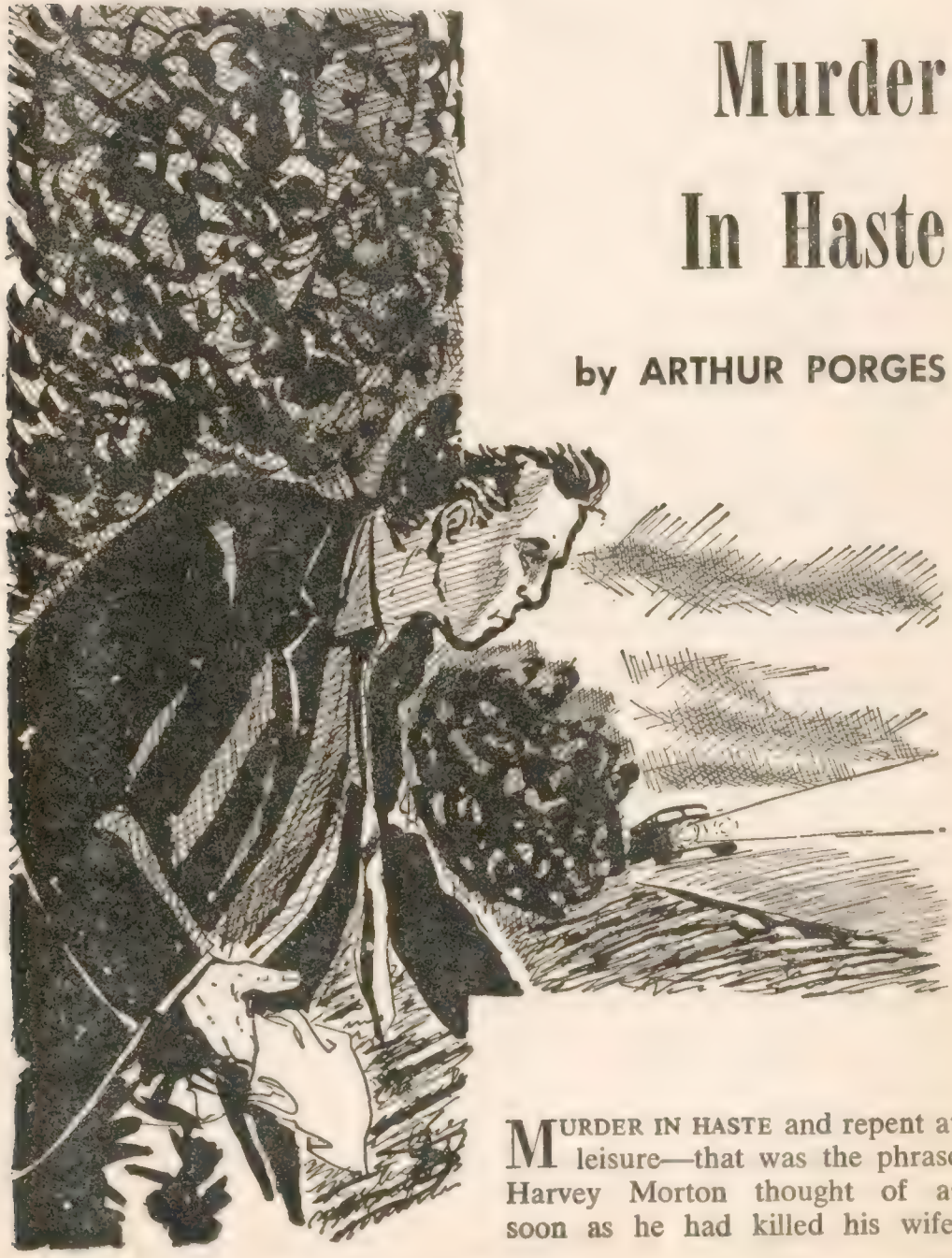
FOR LOVE OR MURDER by Brett Halliday

It's Mike Shayne! It's Full-Length! It's Complete Next Month!

A murder victim who struggles may give the police a clue to her slayer. And that gave Morton an idea.

Murder In Haste

by ARTHUR PORGES



MURDER IN HASTE and repent at leisure—that was the phrase Harvey Morton thought of as soon as he had killed his wife.

There would be little enough leisure, he realized, with a flash of horror, his stomach contracting like a clenched fist, to squirt sourness high into his throat. Only until the first whiff of cyanide gas when they dropped the deadly pellets.

It was ironical—almost unfair—to have it happen like this. He had meant to kill Marcia—had been scheming for months, now, trying to find a foolproof plan. Coolly, calmly, logically, he had considered a variety of methods.

The most promising had been a car accident. That nasty jog in the road, a few hundred feet from their house, had distinct possibilities. Marcia usually took it fast, knowing every inch of the curve. But what if the brake went out, or the steering knuckle came loose, and just where the stone fence stood like the traditional Immovable Object?

Yes, he was being oh so careful, because the police would suspect him, and rightly. They'd have no trouble finding out about Shirley, or Kitty, or Nora; neither would it take them long to hear about his frequent quarrels with Marcia, since so many took place in front of friends and relations. Talk about motives! Marcia's money; a dozen playgirls; their fights over his expenses—all of which made caution imperative.

But there are dormant volcanoes, far from extinct, in the most judicious of men, even if Harvey hadn't known that before. When Marcia started the old theme, major: *You're always sniffing around after young girls—don't think I'm blind;* which was quite true. Minor: *You married me for my money; now I'm sure;* also true. He found himself suddenly and oddly fascinated by the turkey-like wattles of her scrawny neck. Why, she was an old woman—fifteen years older than he—and looked like his mother.

Then had come the expected outburst of obscene venom. It always bothered him that this curdled spinster could mobilize so vulgar a flow of epithets. Where had she learned such language? It must have been from books. No lover had whispered the phrases to her in erotic ecstasy, that was certain. She could never have been attractive, even as a girl. Her only charm lay in her lean right hand: it could write large checks that were honored without a question.

So, forgetting all his logic, and the need for caution, Harvey Morton had glided close, and almost before her slack, pursy mouth could open in fear, had seized that turkey-neck in his big hands. How sweet, for once, to stop the torrent of abuse, instead of bowing to it meekly, and thinking of future checks, eager young girls, and the ultimate escape as a rich, free widower . . .

And now, in one rash moment,

he had doomed himself. He sat there, beside the dead woman, wishing, as many men have done, that he could go back in time. Just five minutes—if only the world's pulse could be stopped and re-set five minutes earlier.

But even for Joshua Time stood still; it has never gone in reverse. Numbly, Morton waited, too dazed to think of running, too full of self-contempt for his stupidity to make the simplest plan.

Almost subconsciously he heard the distant squeal of brakes, and then the metallic crash that meant a bad accident on the highway. It was followed, rather quickly, considering the light traffic at nine in the morning, by the sound of brakes more carefully applied. There was a babble of voices, and he heard a car door slammed, a powerful motor gunned.

Still half-dazed, Morton followed events in a different level of his mind. Somebody had crashed; then another driver, pulling up, had got out. Considering his hasty departure thereafter, he must have taken the victims in his own car, heading for a hospital —probably the one at Madison.

Morton could visualize the scene; it had happened before at the bad jog. There would be a crumpled wreck, perhaps upside down in the field; but only if the car had hit the barbed wire fence. If the unlucky driver had hurtled into that stone wall, it would be worse, with the vehicle bouncing back across the highway, practically in pieces. And blood—lots of blood. Once there had been—Morton winced at the memory—a severed arm, too.

These reflections about the unseen accident finally brought other levels of his mind back to life. By nature a schemer, Harvey Morton, began to function again. He looked down at Marcia. She hadn't been given a chance to struggle, yet her hands were half clenched in a claw-like gesture. Given a few more seconds' warning, and she might have marked his face with her nails. As it was, that evidence, at least, was missing. But there was small consolation in that.

Everything else was against him. The isolated house; the absence of any other suspect; the number of strong motives he had for removing her—no jury would find any reason to delay its verdict once the case came to trial.

The clock chimed softly; nine-thirty—only half an hour since he'd killed her. There was time—hours of it—to find a solution. And if he couldn't, there was still flight. He would cash a large check, forging Marcia's name, and make a run for it. Nobody would find the body for perhaps forty-eight hours, unless all circumstances were against the killer. As he mustered these reassuring notions in his mind, Morton was able to scheme more freely.

Again his glance fell on Marcia's clawing hands. They suggested resistance. She hadn't touched him at all; it had been too quick an execution. Otherwise those nails would be rimmed with dry blood and fragments of skin. Blood! He sat up, tense and eager, a sudden light in his pale eyes.

The accident on the highway! Surely there must be fresh blood at the scene. Suppose he took some, worked it under her nails? Yes, and tore her dress—made it look as if a struggle had taken place.

He jumped up, too excited to sit any longer. It was an idea—a hell of a good one, too. With luck, the blood wouldn't be his type; but even if it were, no cop could find a mark on him. He began to look for flaws—a schemer must always test his plans as they, the Enemy, the Adversaries would. His face darkened. A man could draw blood from his nose, or with a hypo—and still have no scratches. It wouldn't do—wasn't foolproof.

He was pacing now, anxious, more desperate than before, because of so near a miss on solving the problem. Blood wasn't enough; that was clear. He had to have tissue. For a moment, he thought of the rabbits in the brush; a mouse in one of the traps.

Then he jeered at himself. That would be bright, you idiot: human blood and mouse tissue! You know damned well they're going to check it out with the coroner or pathologist or whatever they call the crime lab pooh-bah. Don't go off half-cocked; you have time—use it. One hasty act today has done enough harm; let's not have a reprise so soon.

All right, I need blood *and* tissue, he told himself. No point speculating about it here. Get to the scene, and see what's there, if anything.

He left the house, locking it behind him, and peering around the high hedge, made sure he was unobserved. Quickly, then, he headed for the highway.

It was easy to find the scene of the accident; the pick-up had torn a huge gap in the barbed-wire fence, and then turned on its side. He moved in close, listening for the approach of a car, and then noted with relief that most of the evidence lay in a hollow almost invisible from the road, so that a driver passing by at sixty-plus was unlikely to glimpse enough to make him stop, even if he was the morbid type, far from uncommon.

There was blood, all right, Morton saw, his heart pounding. Several large patches of it were drying on the sere winter grass. But examination of the car showed no tissue or signs of bleeding inside; obviously, the passengers had been tossed clear. Then he spotted something that raised his hopes. A bit of cloth, certainly part of a man's

shirt, was caught in a thorny bush.

Hurriedly, Morton went over to it, and studied the assortment of brambles. To his vast delight, the cloth was stained red, and on one thorn was an unmistakable bit of bloody skin. Eyes glowing, he nipped it off with his finger-tips, and put it in a clean handkerchief. With a corner of the same linen square, he sopped up plenty of blood from a small pool.

A car zoomed by on the road, and he crouched, sweating heavily, until it passed. Then, clutching the precious handkerchief, he made his furtive way back to the house.

Once inside, he quickly set the scene. It was very easy, the kind that seems almost a cliche in crime stories, true or fictional. He rubbed blood and tissue under Marcia's nails, made some tears in her dress, and altered her yet unstiffened body to a position more suggestive of a desperate fight for life.

But he didn't overdo it. A couple of overturned chairs; a broken vase; wrinkles in the carpet—that was enough. The cops would look askance at a prolonged and wild struggle between a skinny woman of sixty and an able-bodied man.

What about the motive? Or should he skip that, lest he do too much? No harm in speaking of missing cash and jewels. The former couldn't be checked, and as for her pearls and the two diamond rings, Morton decided to dispose of them where they'd never be found. What was an extra thousand or two, balanced against the total gain—eighty thousand in stocks; the $40,000 house; and $25,000 of insurance. Let the jewels vanish with the killer!

The whole arrangement took only twenty minutes. By that time, Marcia looked like somebody killed in a fight, and the jewels were buried behind an old stump a hundred yards from the house. Later, when all suspicion of him was dead, he would find a better place —perhaps drop them into the ocean halfway to Catalina Island.

When everything was ready, and his story well prepared, Harvey Morton phoned the police. After explaining, rather incoherently over the wire that he had gone out for a short walk, and returned to find his wife murdered, he rambled wildly enough to encourage a speedy visit from the sheriff's office. In his heart, he felt he had done very well indeed.

Even the walk was consistent with his normal behavior. Often enough, old man Dooley, who owned the little ranch up the highway, had seen him hiking along in almost any weather. Nobody guessed Morton was trying to stay young, vigorous, and muscular at forty-five primarily because it helped in the pursuit of young women; he merely remarked frequently that a man ought to keep himself in condition.

While waiting for the police, he had two stiff drinks, but stopped it there. This was no time to get fuzzy brained, when every word counted.

When Sheriff Wilkins came with his deputy, Hank Gruber, Morton affected a kind of incredulous grief.

"I was only gone half an hour," he repeated several times. "Only half an hour, and some fiend—" He sobbed dryly.

"She certainly fought," Gruber said, almost as if in approval. "Notice her hands, Sheriff?"

"I'm not blind," his boss said with some asperity. "She clawed somebody good." He gave Morton a shrewd stare, and cleared his throat meaningfully. "I won't beat around the bush," he told him. "We always suspect the husband first. Especially," he added, looking down at the body, and then at Morton, "when it's an older woman and a younger man."

Morton stiffened angrily, then slumped again.

"I can't blame you," he said. "But I did love Marcia. I would never hurt her. Ask any of our friends if I ever raised a hand to her, no matter how we might quarrel—not that we did often, or that it meant anything. You're married, Sheriff, aren't you? So you know what I mean."

Gruber suppressed a grin. He knew Mrs. Wilkins, a round, merry little woman, and a superb cook. It would be easier for a man to fight with a sleepy kitten.

"I know what you mean," the sheriff said. "Still, although I can't make you—officially—it would help both of us if—" He stepped closer to Morton, and scrutinized his face. "Let's see your hands."

"Certainly," Morton agreed. "But I don't understand what you're suggesting. Surely you don't think—"

"I don't think at all," Wilkins said. "Too soon. Right now, I just follow routine. Mind taking off your shirt?"

"If you're looking for scratches on me, you're wasting your time," Morton said. "However, I get your point, and want to clear myself as much as you'd like to nail me." He managed to sound aggrieved.

"Nobody's trying to nail you," Wilkins assured him. "Just checking while there's time."

He examined Morton's hairless chest, and stepped behind to peer at his back. He gave a noncommittal grunt, and moved away. Morton put his shirt back on, assuming a sour expression, although inside he was gleeful. It was working like an expensive watch, one part jibing with another in a lovely logical sequence. The sheriff was following just the line Morton wanted him to.

Later, an ambulance came for the body, and Wilkins spoke briefly of the inquest. "After the coroner examines the body—um—your

wife," he added. "Better hang around where we can reach you," was his final word.

"Of course," Morton said. "You'll let me know about the inquest?"

"Yes."

They left.

Then Morton had another drink, and danced a brief, joyous little jig. Home free! They'd taken the bait. All he had to do now was sit tight while they combed the county for a well-clawed killer—who didn't exist.

TWO DAYS LATER, when Morton saw the sheriff's car nearing his driveway, he assumed, reasonably enough, that Wilkins had come to tell him about the inquest, or perhaps how the search for the murderer was coming along. So it was a terrible shock when the moment he opened the door, smiling a welcome, there was a loud clicking noise as the sheriff deftly handcuffed him, Gruber having first seized his wrists.

"Hey!" Morton said weakly, too surprised to react more positively at the indignity.

"Pretty slick," Wilkins said, glowering. "Tired to sucker me good, didn't you?"

"What the devil is this?" Morton demanded, getting his nerve back. It must be a bluff; they couldn't possibly have a thing on him. "If you think I killed her, you're crazy. You saw I wasn't even marked, and that Marcia scratched him. You'd better take these cuffs off, because if you don't, I'll start the damndest false arrest suit you ever heard of!"

"Drop it," Wilkins said. "I suppose you went out to where the accident was, and got some blood and skin—right?"

Morton's face was suddenly like mottled plaster.

"I don't know what you mean," he stammered.

"The sheriff is trying to tell you," Gruber said, smiling grimly, "that if you didn't do it, your wife was strangled by a French poodle!"

Morton gaped at him.

"You picked human skin, all right," Wilkins said. "But what you didn't know is that some of that blood came from the driver's dog. So naturally, when Doc Forrest found human skin, but poodle blood under your wife's nails, why even Hank here got the idea—and he's about the dumbest deputy I've ever had!"

"What d'you mean," Gruber said indignantly. "Who suggested looking up that accident when Doc told us about the dog-blood?"

Then he grinned widely. "Aw, you're still mad cause I got that last piece of pie! Can I help it if your wife thinks you're getting a pot?"

They squabbled amiably while leading Harvey Morton to his doom; and he knew then just how great a gamble he had lost.

Murder by Proxy

It looked like a stone-wall kind of murder case . . . for all of the prime suspects had been elsewhere. But still . . .

A FRANCIS BASCOM IVY STORY

by CHARLES VENTURA

THE REDHEAD WITH the rippling curves uncrossed a shapely pair of legs and crossed her fingers for luck, as her brunette hostess answered the yacht's ship-to-shore telephone. Only her secretary in New York had the yacht's marine number and she had strict orders not to disturb the boss during her vacation cruise.

"It's the faithful Miss Bean," said Pamela Valdez. "She insists on speaking with the one and only Frances Bascom Ivy. Be firm, dear. Tell Beany to put the bodies on ice and you'll find out who-dun-it when you return from your vacation."

Frances sighed as she accepted the instrument. "F.B.Ivy here," she said. "What's up Beany? For your sake, it had better be bad."

She listened intently, then said, "You were right to call, dear. Lola is one of my best friends. My car is parked nearby at the dock and it's only a short drive from our berth at the Bay Harbor Yacht Club to the Ongs' Miami Beach estate. It will save me a lot of time if you call Lola back and tell her I'm on the way."

Female detectives are rare in mystery fiction and when they're honey blondes or redheads distinctly on the glamorous side the rarity becomes even more pronounced. That's why—by a stroke of good fortune which we can vouch for as being wholly coincidental—it gives us so much pleasure to introduce, for the first time in these pages, a new contender for mystery-reader acclaim who differs in many ways from the fabulous Honey West, whose first appearance in a short-story MSMM was also privileged to publish.

Frances Ivy cradled the receiver. "I'll have to run, Pam. Our old schoolmate, Lola Ong, walked into her house twenty minutes ago and found her husband dead at his desk, with a revolver in his hand."

Her hostess looked puzzled. "That's dreadful, of course, but why the frantic haste?" Pamela asked. "I don't want to sound callous, but what are you supposed to do in such a hurry, make sure John Ong is dead? Anyhow, why the fuss? Everyone detested him."

Frances Ivy clucked disapprovingly. "If I didn't know that macabre humor of yours so well I'd think you were heartless," she chided. "Apparently the revolver dropped from John's hand while she was bending over the body. She picked it up from sheer reflex, just as the butler walked into the study. That's why she put in an emergency call to me."

Frances smiled at Pamela's horror-stricken countenance. She said, "Don't take it so hard, flintheart. Lola said she didn't shoot him. She phoned my New York office before calling the local police, because she was afraid some overzealous cop might try to pin a murder rap on her."

Shrugging into a sheer white sweater that matched her abbreviated shorts, Frances gave her hostess a hurried peck on the cheek and headed for the gangplank.

"Give that dashing husband of yours my apologies when he shows up," she called over her shoulder. "Be a dear and send my things to Lola's. You know her address. I'll catch up with you two lovebirds in a few days."

AS FRANCES IVY left her trim white Mercedes-Benz in the driveway and headed for the marble staircase fronting the Ong manse, the front door opened and Lola Ong emerged, with a modish blonde at her side.

Her lips were tightly compressed, and Frances could see that she was making an heroic effort to maintain her composure. She spoke only a few words, as if fearful that just thanking Ivy for coming so quickly would cause her voice to break.

"You remember John's daughter, Helene," Lola said, after the two women had embraced. "Helene has been house-guesting with friends in Miami Beach. She came over immediately when I phoned."

As they entered the house, Lola added: "John's attorney, Walter Tremont, should be here at any moment. He arrived this morning with the board of directors for a business meeting."

Lola Ong paled a little as the trio approached the study door. Frances gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

"There's no need for you or Helene to go in there again," she said. "Give me a few minutes and then send for your butler. I'd like

to talk with Mathews before the police arrive."

Frances closed the door softly and was struck by the relaxed appearance of John Ong's body. The silver-maned head was leaning back against the high-backed red chair as though in peaceful cogitation. She noted the immaculate orderliness of the room's appointments. The only discordant note was the nickel-plated pistol on the desk.

She bent over and studied the powder-marked wound in John Ong's neck for several moments before whipping off the red scarf she wore and using it to pick up the pistol. Examining it minutely, she placed the weapon back on the desk as a knock sounded at the door.

Frances called, "Come in, Mathews," and smiled reassuringly as the perturbed-looking butler came into the room.

Before she could speak, Mathews blurted, "Miss Ivy, the police may be here at any moment. I don't want to tell them that I found Mrs. Ong holding that pistol in her hand. Please tell me what to do."

"Relax, Mathews," she said. "Lying never helps the innocent in the long run. Tell the police exactly what you saw. You will be doing Mrs. Ong a disservice if you do *not* tell the truth."

She pointed to the tidily arranged papers on the desk. "Was everything this neatly arranged when you came into the study and found Mrs. Ong with the body?" she asked.

"Exactly, Miss Ivy. Everything looked so orderly that I could have sworn Mr. Ong was sitting there, resting, until I saw madame with a pistol in her hand and noticed the wound in Mr. Ong's neck."

"What happened, then?"

"Madame put the pistol on the desk and said, sort of absent-mindedly, 'It fell on the floor, Mathews.' She stood there for a few moments, then she said: 'Please bring me the little morocco-bound book you'll find beside my bed and bring it to me in the drawingroom. I must make some phone calls'."

"Did you leave the room together?"

"Yes, Miss Ivy. Madame asked me to stay in the drawingroom after I brought her the book. She said she wanted me there until she finished using the telephone."

"One more question, Mathews. Did you look closely at the wound in Mr. Ong's neck when you first saw the body? Try to describe it to me, if you can."

"There was a lot of dark, brownish blood clotted around it, just about as you see it now."

As they left the study the front door-bell rang.

"If that is Mr. Fremont, show him into the drawingroom and tell Mrs. Ong I'll join everyone there in a few moments," Frances said. "If it's the police take them directly

to the study. Try to join me in the butler's pantry as soon as possible."

When Mathews returned, he found Frances sitting at the telephone, with the cook and downstairs-maid peeping at her curiously from the adjacent kitchen. "It was Mr. Fremont," he said.

"Good!" said the redhead. "Now, tell me, does anyone live in that tiny cottage next door, outside the walls of the estate."

"It's the gardener's residence," said Mathews. "If you want his phone number, I have it here."

He riffled through the pages of a pad and with his thumb on a notation handed it to Frances. "This is his number. His name is McTavish."

A buzzer sounded.

"That's from the drawingroom" Mathews said. He turned and left the room, a worried look in his eyes.

FRANCES IVY talked at length with gardener McTavish and made several more phone calls before joining the group in the drawing room, where she was introduced to Walter Tremont and talked with him for a few moments also. A considerable time elapsed before they heard the doorbell announcing the arrival of the local police.

The little group talked in low tones as they listened to the shuffle of feet and the rumble of voices through the heavy door. Mathews had shown the police directly to the study. It was an hour before the coroner moved John Ong's body from the study into a waiting ambulance.

When Lieutenant Eugene Gillet and Sergeant William Malone of Miami's homicide squad were ushered into the room, they found the youthful widow and her guests waiting in silence.

It wasn't too difficult for the two detectives to catalogue the man with the shrewd calculating eyes and deadpan manner. Every aspect of Walter Tremont's attire and demeanor typed him as the influential barrister.

The three young women were equally easy to classify. All displayed the indefinable poise that goes with fashionable finishing schools and inherited wealth. The blonde was a picture of resort elegance in blue slacks with matching scarf. A Chinese housecoat over red slacks enhanced the brunette beauty of John Ong's widow.

Sergeant Malone had eyes only for the titian-haired member of the glamorous trio. He decided that Frances was easily the most beautiful redhead he had ever encountered. His eyes roved pleasurably over the figure that peeped through in bas-relief from white shorts and sweater and dwelt on the fine sprinkling of freckles that lent warmth to classically-etched features.

Lieutenant Gillet broke an awk-

ward silence. "I'm sorry we couldn't answer your call sooner," he said. "We've had our hands full with two one-hour-apart Cuban killings in the Miami area."

He walked over to where Lola was sitting. "Mrs. Ong, the butler identified the lethal weapon as one your husband kept in the drawer of his desk. But there are a few questions that need to be cleared up. One of them concerns Mathews' statement that you were holding the revolver in your hand when he found you with the body."

Helene spoke impatiently. "Let's not have a lot of third-degree nonsense, Lieutenant. The pistol dropped from father's hand and Lola picked it up. It was nothing more than reflex action."

It seemed to cost Gillet an effort to repress his annoyance at the interruption. He was about to speak when Frances asked: "Has the medical examiner determined the approximate time of death?"

Gillet looked at her curiously. "His report doesn't help much," he said. "It's too bad we couldn't have gotten here a little earlier. He says the condition of the body indicates that Mr. Ong died sometime between four and seven o'clock this evening."

He paused an instant, then went on thoughtfully. "The butler says he returned to the house, after being away most of the day and came into the kitchen from the service entrance at about six-forty.

It was around seven when he discovered Mrs. Ong bending over the body with a pistol in her hand."

Frances nodded. "Mathews has a reputation for accuracy," she said. "However, wouldn't he have heard the shot—if it had been fired at any time following his return?"

"Not likely," was the officer's retort. "He said he turned on the dishwasher and the ventilating fan. There were a number of dirty glasses in the butler's pantry. He put them into the machine before going into the main part of the house to report for duty. I turned on the dishwasher and the fan a few minutes ago. They make a lot of noise."

Gillet paused again, apparently for dramatic effect. "Mrs. Ong could have used a shotgun on her husband and no one in the kitchen

would have heard her. There are three rooms and four closed doors between the kitchen and the room where Mr. Ong was murdered."

The redhead fastened a pair of reproachful blue eyes on the detective. "Please, Lieutenant. Let's not use the word 'murder' so loosely. So far, there isn't the slightest evidence that Mr. Ong was murdered. Incidentally, I queried Mathews about the condition of the corpse when he first saw it. He said that the blood around the wound in Mr. Ong's neck was dark and congealed.

"I don't have to tell you how clearly such post-mortem appearances indicate that death occurred some time before the butler found Mrs. Ong bending over her husband's body with a pistol in her hand."

She hated to speak so clinically in Lola Ong's presence, but felt she had no choice.

Gillet's face reddened. "Why didn't Mathews tell *me* that?" he demanded.

The blue eyes were innocent. "Possibly because you didn't ask him."

Frances turned to Lola. "Will you send for Mathews, dear? Lieutenant Gillet might like to verify my statement."

"Never mind," growled Gillet. "I'm sure Mathews will verify it." He and Sergeant Malone exchanged significant glances.

Frances Ivy said in the same placid tones, "No doubt Mathews informed you that Mr. Ong left instructions for all of the servants, including the gardeners, to leave the estate at one o'clock and return at seven, so his board meeting could be held in privacy. Mrs. Ong also left the house at one to keep a luncheon date with Miss Sepha Fordyce at the Surf Club. She spent the rest of the day with her on the beach, fronting the club.

There are several people who were at the club, including Alfred Barton, the president of the organization, who told me they saw Mrs. Ong leave the club at six forty-five and drive north, in the opposite direction from her home. She explained to me that she didn't want to arrive until seven o'clock, the time designated for everyone's return by Mr. Ong, who was a martinet when it came to punctuality. She drove north for awhile before turning the car and coming back to the estate."

Gillet looked skeptical. "Your informants could have been way off on the time. Most of those rich elbow-benders wouldn't know the time of day if they were sober. This was during the cocktail hours. And what would have prevented Mrs. Ong from driving north for a block or two, scooting around the block and then entering the house and shooting her husband at—say —six o'clock?"

"Wouldn't that be rather a long time to stand over a dead body

with a pistol in your hand?" was Frances' gentle rejoinder. "As you pointed out so explicitly, Mathews said he discovered Mrs. Ong clutching a revolver, at almost exactly seven o'clock."

Malone's snicker was involuntary. His superior's glare froze the grin on the Sergeant's face into an apologetic grimace.

The musical low-pitched voice of Frances Ivy resumed. "By the way, Lieutenant, I questioned the gardener next door. His cottage overlooks the entrance to this estate. He said he was watching T.V. when he saw Mrs. Ong drive in. He heard the time announced as she got out of the car and walked into the house."

All eyes were focused on the redhead.

"The gardener said that the time announced on television was seven o'clock," she concluded.

Walter Tremont cleared his throat noisily. "Lieutenant, before you go any further down this blind alley," he said, "perhaps you would like to hear a statement I made to Miss Ivy shortly after my arrival. She asked several questions about today's board meeting that may interest you because of the time element.

"I flew down from New York with nine other members of Mr. Ong's board of directors and my private secretary. We arrived at Miami's International Airport around noon. Four of us, who had made plans to get in a few days' fishing, rented two U-Drive-It cars. The others and my secretary came over in a seven-passenger Cadillac with a driver, whom they arranged to have wait for them."

He paused for a moment as if to collect his thoughts. "We all arrived shortly after one. The meeting was a short one. It broke up about two-thirty. We had a drink or two and left around three-thirty. Tom Harbin and I drove to the Seaside Hotel in our rented car. Jack Philbin and Roy Burke went to the marine docks to pick up their boat. The other members of the board and my secretary were taken to the airport, where, I presume, they boarded a five o'clock plane for New York, according to plan."

Tremont hesitated for an almost imperceptible moment. "As I told Miss Ivy and the family, it was difficult to say whether Mr. Ong was deprsesed or despondent at the time our meeting broke up. He always hid his emotions behind a poker face."

"Just for the record," said Gillet, "What did you and Mr. Harbin do after you checked in at the Seaside Hotel?"

"We decided to get in a little fishing before dark and took off from our hotel dock in a chartered boat. Originally, we intended to join Mr. Philbin and Mr. Burke on a bonefishing excursion to Key Largo, but when we heard the

sailfish were biting, we switched plans."

The redhead broke in with seeming irrelevance. "Did you have the usual crew of two?"

"No," was the attorney's prompt response. "We chartered a boat without a crew. Professional fishermen get on our nerves. We took turns skippering the craft. We're both excellent pilots. Incidentally, we still have the boat. We took it for a week."

"In other words," said Lieutenant Gillet, "there is no one to verify your whereabouts directly after the meeting, except Mr. Harbin and vice versa?"

Tremont smiled. "Not unless you count the man at the hotel dock from whom we chartered the boat."

"What time did you return to the hotel docks?"

"I didn't check, but it was still light when we came through the inlet. Tom and I just had showered and were dressing for dinner when Mrs. Ong called. My guess is that she phoned me around seven-thirty."

"And your associates, Philbin and Burke?" the Lieutenant asked.

"To the best of my knowledge they took off for Key Largo on their boat about the time we left to go fishing. I know they planned to arrive at the Key Largo Club in time for dinner."

The Lieutenant's glance was calculating. "I know I have no legal right to ask this," he said. "But would you submit to a paraffin test for powder stains?"

The attorney chuckled. "Gladly. Do you have the paraphernalia handy?"

Gillet returned his smile. "It was just a routine question."

The Lieutenant sighed. "Actually, paraffin tests wouldn't be too conclusive in a case like this. For instance, we found powder in the pores of Mr. Ong's right hand, but that didn't mean much. He and Mrs. Ong were practicing at a pistol range less than twenty-four hours ago. Powder stays in the pores for some time. That's why I didn't ask Mrs. Ong to submit to a test."

"How did you know about the Ongs being at a shooting range?" asked Tremont.

"I saw them. They did their practicing at the police range on the military trail. You probably know they're both crack-shots and have won several tournaments."

Tremont nodded and rose to his feet. "This has been a great shock to Mrs. Ong and there are a great many necessary personal arrangements we must discuss. I'd be very grateful if you'd permit her an hour or so to get—well, a little better prepared to meet the ordeal that awaits her in the next few days."

The detective signalled his assistant. "Before we leave," he said, singling out the shapely red-

head, "would you mind telling me where in the world a society dame like you picked up all that post-mortem savvy?"

Frances smiled shyly, fished around in a pretty beaded handbag and handed Gillet a card.

He read it aloud: "F. B. Ivy, Private Investigator."

"How about that?" he said. "A private eye."

Sergeant Malone cleared his throat and spoke for the first time since entering the room. "That is the understatement of the year," he said fervently. "Miss Ivy, what the Lieutenant really meant was 'private eyeful'!"

II

DESPITE A LETHARGIC libido and too many years of too willing housemaids, Mathews found his pulse racing as he rounded a corner of the house and caught sight of the four beauties basking in the sun beside the Ong swimming-pool.

He lingered as long as he dared before beating a strategic retreat to the main house, where he telephoned the message he had intended to transmit in person.

Lola Ong rolled over lazily and picked up the receiver of the extension phone connected with the poolhouse. She looked puzzled as she leaned over and handed the instrument to the reclining redhead.

"It's for you, darling. Mathews says the caller won't divulge his identity, but that you'll know who he is."

The deep masculine voice started without preamble. "I don't want to identify myself by name. Someone might be listening in. I'm calling from a phone booth at the Lido Pools, not too far from you. I have something very important to discuss with you. Will you—"

Frances Ivy interrupted. "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

She hung up immediately and rose to her feet. "Sorry, Lola," she said. "That was an urgent call. I have to run. I should be back in time for lunch." She shrugged into a fluffy white beachrobe and ran gracefully toward the house.

It was less than a three mile drive. After turning her trim speedster over to an attendant she strolled into the Lido and headed

straight for the tall, husky man who was rising to his feet near the swimming pool.

"You are a wonder," said Sergeant William Malone. He extended a large, powerful-looking hand. "Anyone else I know would still be on the phone, asking who was calling."

"I'm glad you are in swim trunks," said Frances. "I'll get out of this beachrobe and we can chat in the pool, where we won't look like cloak-and-dagger conspirators."

"That makes sense," was Malone's response. He threw an oblique glance at the contours emphasized by the snug bikini.

After they had splashed the length of the pool twice and settled down, side by side, on the steps at the shallow end, Frances said, "We can talk here without being overheard."

"The Lieutenant is still down at Key Largo," Malone said. "He flew down last night to check on Philbin and Burke. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Gillet is convinced that Mr. Ong's bullet-wound was not self-inflicted. One reason is the trajectory followed by the bullet, and he claims he has an even better reason up his sleeve."

She looked at him, her blue eyes thoughtful. "What do you think, Bill?"

Malone flushed with pleasure at the use of his first name. "I'm inclined to go along with Gene. According to the coroner, the bullet was fired from left to right and we have established that Mr. Ong was right-handed. The bullet penetrated the cricoid cartilage, smashed through the lateral walls of the larynx and emerged from the posterior palatine arch. It certainly would have been difficult for Mr. Ong to have pointed the pistol at the left side of his neck, and fired from left to right."

Frances nodded soberly. "It does seem unnatural. However, Mr. Ong could have turned his head before impact. It isn't too difficult to visualize a sensitive man shrinking away from the sight of the weapon, even as he pulls the trigger."

Malone raised his right hand, pointed a finger at his throat and twisted his head. "You've got a point there. He might have done it that way. The powder burns make it seem logical." He frowned. "But then again, it wouldn't be too difficult to visualize that same sensitive man shrinking away from the sight of a pistol thrust point-blank into his face."

Frances shook her head. "I think we can be reasonably certain that if it was murder Mr. Ong's assailant found him asleep. If he had been awake, it would have been impossible for anyone to open the desk drawer where he kept his pistol, take out the weapon and shoot him, without leaving some trace of

violence in the wake of the assassination.

"It's too bad Mathews was so quick to wash the glasses he found in the butler's pantry. We might have found traces of a powerful soporific."

Frances rose from the step, and he followed in her wake as she swam the length of the pool, and climbed out at the deep end.

Malone ushered the redhead into her car and stood uncertainly in the driveway after tipping the attendant. She reached up and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Is there some place I can contact you?" she asked.

Flushing a little Malone reached into the pocket of his beachrobe, and withdrew a card case with an attached pencil. He scribbled hurriedly.

"That's my home telephone number and street address. If I'm not in, leave word. My mother is trained to take messages—especially when the voice is feminine."

He stood in the driveway, watching the bright head and the sleek speedster until both were out of sight before heaving a sigh, and reentering the Lido.

III

THERE WERE TWO masculine figures in swim trunks at poolside when Frances Ivy returned from her meeting with Sergeant Malone. The three women still wore their bikinis—with bras modestly in place.

She recognized Tremont. The youngish man bending over Lola possessively was introduced as Tom Harbin. She instinctively disliked what she read on his florid, handsome features as his gaze wandered boldly over her scantily clad body.

"I've asked Walter and Tom to spend a few days with us," said Lola. "Walter will be in the annex. Tom wants to keep in touch with the various railroads that John controlled, so I've given him John's quarters. It's the only suite with a private wire that doesn't go through the kitchen switchboard."

"Lola tells me that my suite adjoin yours," Harbin said. "I'm partial to redheads who walk in their sleep. I trust you suffer from insomnia."

Ignoring the verbal pass, Frances Ivy said innocently, "I don't know too much about business, Mr. Harbin. Does your taking over Mr. Ong's private wire mean that you inherit his authority?"

Tremont intervened smoothly. "Tom is one of the vice-presidents of John Ong's holding company and president of Northwestern Railroad. Actually, it will take a meeting of the board to appoint John's successor as chairman."

Frances went into her best wide-eyed wonderment act. "Would you explain the functions of a holding company, Mr. Tremont?" she asked.

The attorney's eyes twinkled. "Probably the best way I can explain this one in simple terms is to say that it controls all of the railroads Mr. Ong took over during the past thirty years. Most of the executive officers are not much more than puppets. John Ong pulled the strings through his holding company.

Tremont threw a glance at Harbin, who seemed content to let the older man do the talking. "The holding company controls nine railroads. The president of each is a vice-president of the holding company. They comprise a board. Tom Harbin seems the logical choice to be the board member who will succeed John. He was very close to him and was usually notified when John intended to make a move."

"Are you a president of a railroad also?" Frances asked.

The attorney smiled. "I'm secretary and treasurer of Mr. Ong's holding company. My firm handles all the legal details of his railroad empire."

The auburn beauty seemingly lost interest in pursuing the subject. Sepha took over with a slightly risque story which found a receptive audience.

Frances Ivy allowed her eyes to wander around the little group. She wondered which of the two men had been in New York, on the receiving end of a long-distance conversation with John Ong the morning of his death. According to Lola, the conversation, which centered around Northwestern proxies, had been replete with profanity on Ong's part.

As Sepha started another story Frances broke in, "Tell me, Mr. Harbin. Do you control the proxies of Northwestern Railroad?"

"My dear," Tremont said, before Harbin could reply, "no one man actually controls proxies. Some are more persuasive than others in influencing stockholders to vote shares their way."

He looked at her inquiringly. "Did you have any particular type of transaction in mind when you asked that question? I'm afraid you'll have to be more specific."

"I've read newspaper stories about proxy battles and have always wondered what they were all about," was her bland response. "I had the general impression that a proxy battle ensues when someone tries to gain control of a company—like Mr. Harbin wanting to run Mr. Ong's company."

Harbin laughed. "There's no pro battle involved here." His tone was patronizing. "The board members will meet and choose Mr. Ong's successor. I think I will get the nod."

Tremont said: "Tom is the logical choice. There can be no doubt as to the outcome." He changed the subject abruptly as if he regretted having dwelt on it at such length.

"Roy Burke phoned me from Key Largo this morning," he said. "He told me Gillet was waiting for him and Philbin at the dock. Roy was snorting like a beagle with a bug in his nose. Gillet asked him and Jack if they would submit to a paraffin test of their trigger hands. They emphatically refused."

"That wasn't smart," Helene said. "Now they'll have that flatfoot in their hair, day and night. A little soft soap works much better. Look how our Frances washed that man right out of *our* hair."

Harbin said: "Roy and Jack didn't have the right kind of dandruff remover. Somebody should tell them about head and shoulders—red head and freckled shoulders."

IV

FRANCIS IVEY agreed to remain at the estate while Helene and Lola accompanied John Ong's body to New York for interment in the family plot on one condition—that they persuade one of their feminine friends to share the suite she occupied during their absence.

"How about Sepha Fordyce?" Helene suggested. "Sepha is witty and entertaining. Lola and I adore her."

Frances agreed enthusiastically. She had liked the trim little blonde on sight. A phone call to Sepha evoked a hearty assent, and a short time later she taxied up, complete to seven large suitcases, as the family chauffeur drove the town car under the porte-cochere to transport Helene and Lola to the railroad station.

Helene looked at the array of luggage being taken out of the taxi in mock dismay. "We'll be gone for three days, darling—not three months," she said. "You haven't worn enough clothes to fill that many bags since the day you and Lola met. That was two years ago, remember—when you muscled in on her honeymoon with Dad?"

Sepha laughed and turned to Frances. "Lola was the one who muscled in on me. We met in the sea, fronting the Surf Club. I was fighting a losing battle against a vicious undercurrent when this Amazon appeared out of nowhere and manhandled me back to shore."

She gave a reminiscent shudder. "What muscles the girl has. I was all bumps and contusions for weeks."

Helene said with startling candor, "You mean you were all bumps and grinds. You made a play for Dad at every opportunity." She smiled at the expression on the redhead's face.

"We don't sound much like mourners, do we?" Helene went on. "The truth is, no one could warm up to father. He lived in a mental igloo. He had an icy disdain for everyone he knew, especially his family. My mother simply withered away under that awful chill. Father didn't shed a tear at her funeral. I doubt if he ever suffered a pang of remorse at the inhuman way he'd treated her. I know it sounds unnatural for a daughter to talk this way. But now that he's gone—I don't feel any grief at all."

Helene threw an arm around Sepha's shoulders. "We three banded together when Dad went on the warpath. Sepha could work miracles with him. He was almost human when she was around. She brightened up all our lives when she made Lola move over."

Lola said: "I wish you could see your face, Frances. Not that I blame you. Even Alfred Barton, who is noted for being shock-proof, looked glassy-eyed the first time I called Sepha 'John's other wife'."

Tremont and Harbin appeared as the two were being helped into the car by the chauffeur. The former leaned in the window of the limousine.

"I'll meet your train at Penn Station," he said to Lola. "My plane leaves in a couple of hours. Incidentally, Tom wants to get together with Philbin and Burke while we're in New York. You don't mind if they stay here for a few days, do you, Lola?"

"Of course not. There's plenty of room in the annex," Lola replied instantly.

Later that day, Frances was on her bedroom balcony, typing out a series of memos to her New York office and her companion was stretched out on a deck-chair reading a paperback novel, when she noted a trim, white yacht idling offshore.

Her look of absent-minded curiosity quickened into a speculative gleam as two figures dove overboard and headed toward shore. By the time the swimmers had reached the beach between the high seawalls that separated the Ong estate from the adjoining properties, a small power-boat put out from the yacht.

A door beneath the balcony opened noisily. A moment later, Harbin, clad in swim shorts, hurried across the lawn with Mathews and the chauffeur to greet the newcomers.

They stood on the beach until the launch was piloted skillfully through the mildly breaking surf to within a few yards of the beach.

One of the crewmen leaped overboard. The remaining man

began handing out luggage. After several large bags were transferred from boat to beach, the shoregoing seaman waded out and climbed aboard the dingy. His companion gunned the motor and headed back to the yacht.

Harbin and the newcomers stood chatting as the butler and chauffeur disappeared into the house with the first of the suitcases.

Sepha, who had been immersed in her book, looked up to see a strange expression on the redhead's face. She followed her gaze and laughed happily. "The reinforcements have landed."

She studied her companion's expressive features. "Frances, you look as though you were seeing a ghost instead of two live prospects."

"It's more like seeing the handwriting on the sands," muttered Frances. "Just my own private joke, honey. I'll tell you all about it some day."

Sepha gazed at her round-eyed as she resumed her typing. Harbin and the two nautical visitors approached the house. The former hailed them as they came within earshot of the balcony.

"Girls, I want you to meet my associates, Jack Philbin and Roy Burke," Harbin said.

The man introduced as Philbin was tall, and broad-shouldered, with sandy hair. He appeared to be in his early thirties. As he smiled up at them, Burke, a shorty with a bald head and twinkling black eyes, greeted them cordially.

Harbin leered at the beauties on the balcony. "I've been bragging about how you gals look in bikinis. How about joining us at the swimming-pool in an hour or so?"

"Sorry, I'm busy," said Frances, trying hard to keep the dislike she felt from showing in her voice.

The reclining blonde shot her a reproachful look.

"There's nothing to stop you from taking a dip," Frances said. "I just happen to dislike Harbin."

"Okay, boys, it's a date," Sepha called down, brightening perceptibly. "See you later in the semi-nude."

The trio laughed in unison and disappeared into the house.

Sepha dropped her book, yawned and stretched like a sleepy kitten. "Honey," she drawled, "don't let your dislike for Tom Harbin keep you away from Jack Philbin. Jack is an eligible bachelor, a nice guy and really loaded. You and he already have one thing in common. You both detest Harbin."

She noted the sudden interest in her companion's eyes. "Don't get your hopes up too much dear," she went on quickly. "Jack is as bashful as a choir boy, even if he is a two-fisted slugger. I tried to seduce him in a subtle way. He didn't even realize I was making a pass."

Frances laughed. "I'm not interested in Mr. Philbin's eligibility, or

virility," she said. "I would like to know why he hates Harbin."

"It all started way back when Jack was engaged to marry Lisa McMahon," Sepha said. "Lisa's father, Cyrus McMahon, was one of the richest men in the country, besides being the president of Northwestern Railroad. But Jack wasn't interested in the old boy's wealth, just his daughter."

Sepha heaved a sentimental sigh. "If any two people were meant for each other it was Lisa and Jack Philbin. Well, to make a long story more boresome, Lisa and Jack put off their marriage for three years, because her father was critically ill. He finally died of a heart attack. You'll understand better why Philbin hates Harbin when I tell you that a phone call from Lisa, informing papa that she just had eloped with Tom Harbin, brought on the attack."

"I'm surprised that Tom Harbin would invite Philip in to sleep under the same roof with him," Frances said.

"You wouldn't be, if you knew him better. He's pretty stupid. He thinks he can win him and Burke over with his charm."

"What was Harbin before he married Lisa?"

"A seedy customer's man in a Wall Street bucketshop. He married into control of Northwestern, sold out to John Ong by voting Lisa's proxies in favor of a takeover by John and got the presidency as a reward for the sellout. It's a good company. Lisa controls fifty-one percent of the stock. None of it has ever been peddled on the Street."

"Until now," Frances interjected. "Lola said she overheard John Ong on the phone browbeating someone in New York into placing the shares on the open market, so they could raise some quick cash to bolster up some of the weak railroads in the Ong empire. That someone probably was Harbin. Incidentally, I noticed the stock opened at one hundred and now is listed at two hundred."

Sepha sat up abruptly. "That burns me up! Why didn't John tell me Northwestern was being placed on the market? I could have parlayed my small nest egg into a fortune. I'd be independently rich today."

Frances patted her shoulder. "That's probably why he didn't let you in on it. From what I've learned about Mr. Ong, he liked to keep his close associates under his thumb."

V

AFTER SEPHA FORDYCE had donned the scantiest of her bikinis and set off gaily for her triple-threat rendezvous at the swimming pool, Frances Ivy put the finishing touches to her correspondence and drove to the nearest pay-phone.

Her first call was to her New

York office. She and her secretary exchanged the customary pleasantries about the boss lapping up sunshine while the put-upon office drudge battled her way to work through snowstorms, before France got down to business.

"I am posting an airmail, special-delivery letter to you with explicit instructions. Call me at the Ong residence the moment you receive it, but don't refer to its contents over the phone."

Frances then phoned the number Sergeant Malone had given her and was pleasantly surprised to hear his voice.

"I'll meet you at the same place, same costume, in about twenty minutes, if you can make it," she said.

"Let's call it an hour," he answered. "I'm on the Miami side of the bay."

"Good! That will give me time to drop over to see my telephone friend, Mr. McTavish, the gardener next door to the Ong estate. I want to ask him a few more questions."

She found the elderly gardener puttering around on the waterfront. "You've been so helpful," Frances said after introducing herslef. "I wondered if you would be kind enough to answer a few more questions. Were you here at the waterfront at any time, the day before yesterday?"

"I sure was," the gardener replied. "I came down here to empty the swimming pool. I stayed until

I cleaned it out and filled it again, but can't remember exactly what time it was when I got finished."

"Did you see any signs of unusual activity along the shore?"

"Can't say's I did. There was a few boats not too far off, with people divin' and cavortin' in the water off a couple of them. Nothing unusual about that. Someone's always getting bored and taking a swim off them fishin' boats."

"Could you see if any of the swimmers came ashore?"

"It ain't likely. I was in and out of the swimming pool scrubbing it up and such. It'd be pretty hard to see what was going on from the bottom of the pool. I don't recollect seeing no one except Mrs. Ong. She's out there a lot. Swims like a fish. Nope, I don't remember seeing her come ashore. Didn't look though. Like I told you, I was busy cleaning the pool."

Frances sighed. The Surf Club was less than three blocks from the Ong estate. A strong swimmer like Lola, she reflected, could make the circuit from the club to the estate and back with ease during the time Sepha was either sleeping or absorbed in reading on the beach.

It was a pensive Frances Ivy

who drove off to keep her appointment with Sergeant Malone. En route, she wondered if the same possibility had since occurred to Gillet—or his assistant.

Malone greeted her enthusiastically. "Nothing new at this end," he said. "Gene and I have been busy trying to trace two more Cuban killings to pro-Castro elements. But Gene keeps hinting that he's got something pretty important up his sleeve on the Ong case."

Frances glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes. "Today is Tuesday. With any luck, you can dump Mr. Ong's killer into Lieutenant Gillet's lap before the end of the week," she said.

Malone gaped. "You're joking, of course."

"I was never more serious. I want you to phone the Ong residence every morning at ten and every afternoon at five. We'll have to risk having someone recognize your voice. I may need you in a hurry. Start calling tomorrow morning. Can I depend on you?"

"I've got a better idea. My vacation is a month overdue. I'll take a week of it now. That way I can be available at any time. I'll hang around here during the day and at home after dark."

"Bill, that would be perfect. We're going to lay a trap for the killer. I can't give you the details until I've had a chance to set the stage. It may take a day or two."

"Okay, Boss," said Malone with a wide grin. "It won't be a hardship to hang around here."

He gestured toward several pretty girls in varying stages of undress. Frances grinned, kissed his cheek and dove into the pool. They did the length of the pool twice before she bundled herself into her bathrobe and drove back to the Ong estate.

She joined Sepha and the men upon her return from the Lido rendezvous. Harbin was his usual aggressive self. Jack Philbin divided his attention politely between the two girls. They chatted idly until Frances mentioned Burke's encounter with Lieutenant Gillet at Key Largo.

Burke, who had been basking with his eyes closed, snorted and sat up. "That guy thinks he is a holy terror. When he asked us to submit to a paraffine test right in front of all our friends at the Key Largo Club I could have killed him."

Frances nodded sympathetically. "Gillet gave Lola and Mr. Tremont an extremely hard time, too," she said.

Sepha broke in, "You boys missed a real treat. You should have seen our Frances Ivy in action. She made that flatfoot look silly."

Burke said," That I would have liked to see." He turned to Frances. "How did you ever happen to choose crime investigation as a career?"

Frances made a wry face. "It's a long, dull story."

"Don't you believe it," Sepha said. "Lola told me the story. It's not surprising she's the busiest private eye in the city."

Frances was relieved when Harbin broke in before Sepha could go on.

"Who needs a private-eye, or a policeman?" he said. "All the evidence in this case points to suicide. Frances is just here to cheer Lola up."

Burke shook his head. "I can't go along with a suicide theory. John Ong came out of our meeting with a better financial and strategic position than he ever had. He was sitting on top of the world the day he died."

Philbin made an affirmative sound.

"Nonsense," said Harbin. "John had been on the verge of a nervous breakdown for months. Who would want to see him dead?"

Burke's laugh was raucous. "Off-hand, I can think of ten men. Every member of his board had reason to hate him. He was a sadistic puppeteer and we all danced to his strings."

Harbin looked uncomfortable as he changed the subject. Tapping Burke's knee for attention, he said, "Let's talk business. Have you thought over what I said about the new setup?"

"Yes," said the little man as he carefully removed Harbin's hand from his knee. "The answer is a definite no! Jack and I talked it over. We don't want you. We don't need a pale carbon copy of John Ong. The real thing was bad enough."

Harbin surprised everyone by laughing heartily. "Do you go along with that, Jack?"

"Let's put it this way," said Philbin cautiously. "I've got some ideas I intend to present at our board meeting, this Saturday."

"Naturally," said Harbin in soothing tones. "That's what board meetings are for, to explore everyone's ideas and suggestions before taking action."

"You mean," said Burke grimly," that's what they are *going* to be for, from now on. I, for one, am not jerking at the end of anyone's string now that the master puppeteer is dead."

VI

FRANCES awakened next morning to the sound of voices. She peered out the window and saw Burke and Philbin walking toward the beach. They were followed by Mathews, who was carrying two baskets. The same craft that had ferried the two men to the estate was lying offshore. A motor launch awaited them near the water line.

Sepha stirred in the bed across the room and peered out of the window. "They're hoping to catch blue marlin," she said. "If you ask

me, Jack and Roy are real drips. Imagine leaving two lush babes like us for a mess of smelly fish."

Frances sat up in bed. "That leaves you with only Harbin," she said. "I have an idea, Sepha. Why don't you invite that tall, handsome detective who was with Lieutenant Gillet to spend the day with us at the swimming pool?"

Frances slipped out of bed with a delightful display of brown and white epidermis and frothy blue lingeree, picked up a handbag and fished around inside.

"He gave me his phone number," she said. "As I recall, he said he was about to take his vacation, so he's available. Here it is—William Malone. This is his home phone number. He said he lives with his mother. Ask him for breakfast. Mathews can serve it beside the pool."

Her blonde roommate giggled. "For a shy, retiring number, you are quite an operator. All right—I'll phone him."

Frances rang for Mathews and instructed him to set up a table for three on the terrace beside the pool. She was about to hang up when she remembered that Harbin had not joined his seagoing associates.

"Better make that breakfast for four, Mathews. Mr. Harbin may decide to join us."

The butler coughed discreetly. "Mr. Harbin had his breakfast an hour ago, Miss Ivy. That is, if you can call two shakerfuls of Bloody Marys breakfast."

"Thanks for the warning," Frances said, as she replaced the receiver.

A quick shower and Frances slipped into a two-piece swim suit that emphasized the blue of her eyes, tossed a fluffy beach robe around her shoulders and stretched out on a balcony chaise-longue to wait for Sepha.

She was mentally thanking her lucky stars that the balcony to the adjacent quarters, now occupied by Tom Harbin, fronted on the opposite side out of sight, when his angry voice reached her through an open window.

"You'd better get down here and go to work on them," she heard him say. "You know the deal we made. I want that chairmanship and you're going to get it for me. Sure, I know Jack hates me, but this is business. He knows I'm the best man for the job."

Harbin's disagreeable laugh followed a long pause. "All right. So work on the other board membres. A word of advice, Walter. Don't try to cross me. You should know by now that it won't be healthy."

The telephone in Frances' suite interrupted her eavesdropping. She hurried in, carefully closing the french doors and the bedroom's two casement windows.

Sepha poked a tousled head out of the bathroom as the phone continued to ring. She waved and dis-

appeared as she saw her roommate pick up the receiver.

The caller was Lola Ong.

"Helene and I are flying back this afternoon," Lola said. "Will you have Gregory pick us up at the airport in the town car at six? No, Walter won't be with us. He's staying on until Saturday. He plans to fly down with several members of the board for a meeting at our place."

Frances told her about their invitation to Sergeant Malone. Lola laughed and put Helene on the phone, after relaying the news.

"You are a real genius," Helene said." If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. While Gillet is heckling us, we keep tabs on him through his assistant. Smart girl! Now you've got two watchdogs to keep Harbin at bay. By the way, how is Tom behaving?"

Frances relayed Mathews' message about the Bloody Marys.

Helene said, "That figures. Bye now. See you this evening."

Malone and Sepha were gamboling in the pool like two seal puppies and Frances was leisurely finishing her last cup of tea when Harbin emerged from the house, wearing swim shorts and an arrogant smile.

Ignoring the pair in the pool, he pulled up a chair and placed a possessive hand on the Frances' bare knee. As she attempted to rise, his hand slid upward and tightened its grip.

"Never mind the hard-to-get routine," he whispered. "I haven't time to play games. You and I are going places together. I knew you went for me the moment we met."

He gave a yelp of pain, released his hold and rose to his feet as a cascade of boiling-hot tea poured over his bare legs.

Frances was up and in the swimming pool before he had time

to do more than open his mouth. As he stood there uncertainly, she stroked leisurely over to the opposite side of the pool and joined the frolicking pair.

From the corner of her eye she saw Harbin walk to the edge of the pool, pause uncertainly, then stalk off to the oceanfront. She breathed a sigh of relief as he plowed through the sand and dove into the first of a series of breakers.

Pulling herself out of the water, she rang for Mathews, who appeared in a surprisingly short space of time.

"More tea and croissants, please, Mathews," she said "This salt air stimulates the appetite."

"Yes, Miss Ivy. These table burners are handy gadgets, aren't they? Keep the tea piping hot."

Watching the butler make his way toward the house through the heavy shrubbery that lined the walk, she suddenly realized that the elderly flunky kept a constant eye on the pool terrace. She recalled Lola's assurance that their sun-bathing was unobserved, and flushed furiously as Sepha and Malone joined her at the table.

Sepha sighed enviously. "I'd give my soul, if I had one, to be able to blush like that," she said. "What happened, honey? Did your bra slip, or did you just do a delayed take on one of Tom Harbin's lover-boy proposals?"

"No, dear. I just found myself wishing that we could pin John Ong's death on the favorite target in the film who-dun-its."

The two looked at her inquiringly.

"I mean the family butler."

VII

WHEN LOLA ONG and Helene arrived from the airport, the maid who met them at the door explained that Mathews was shuttling various parcels from the ocean front to the house. Philbin and Burke had come ashore in their motor launch.

They found Frances Ivy, Sepha Fordyce and Sergeant Bill Malone with the returned anglers, audibly admiring an assortment of very lively piscatorial catches. The objects of their admiration were flopping about animatedly in the bottom of the launch, which had been dragged up beyond the water-line.

After an interchange of greetings, the grinning Burke said, "I hope you girls like fish. These are for the table. We left a five-hundred pound marlin on the yacht. The captain is taking it to the taxidermist to be mounted.

"With your permission," he said, turning to Lola, "we'd like to leave our skiff on the beach until morning. We plan to get an early start and rendezvous with our yacht off the inlet."

Lola smiled assent. "Of course!" She noticed that Malone was eyeing her uncertainly. "Please stay

and have dinner with us, Bill," she said. "If you're allergic to fish, we've got some terrific steaks."

The big detective shot Mrs. Ong a grateful look. "I wasn't sure you'd want a flatfoot around socially," he said. "Thanks. Fish is my favorite dish."

Harbin, who had strolled down at that moment from the house said, "You mean it's your favorite dish *next* to redheads."

Sepha, who had been an observant listener, turned to Harbin. "What happened to you, bub? One moment you were standing at poolside and the next, you were jumping in the ocean. Where have you been hiding since this morning, when you took the plunge?"

"I'm a businessman, not a playboy," he said stiffly. "I've been carrying on important transactions over the telephone."

"You mean you've been sleeping it off," Sepha scoffed. "You had a real bun on this morning when you made an incomplete forward-pass at Frances and were thrown for a loss."

Harbin peered guiltily at Lola. The look she gave him was lethal.

Frances noted that Philbin was watching the byplay. She could see realization, then cold anger dawn in his eyes as his gaze traveled from Lola's angry flush to Harbin's now brick-red features.

SERGEANT MALONE pleaded official duties and thanked his hostess for a pleasant evening, after the guests had drifted from the dining-room and were sampling the late John Ong's thirty-year-old brandy in the drawingroom.

Frances, who had given him an unobtrusive signal, handed him the key to her Mercedes. "I'll see you to the car, Bill. You can bring it back in the morning. Lola has plenty of spare automobiles in the garage, if I should need one."

Her hostess added a hearty agreement as she accompanied them to the front door. She bade Malone a cordial goodbye before returning to the other guests.

When Frances and Malone reached her parked speedster, she unlocked the luggage compartment, reached in and lifted out a leather-bound case. "I need this," she said. "Please drive out the gates and down the street a short distance. Leave the car and come back on foot. Give me ten minutes to park this little item and another ten for good measure and meet me at the poolhouse. We may have a big night ahead of us."

The group still lingered in the drawingroom when she returned to the house following a few hurried instructions to Malone.

Sepha addressed her in a carrying stage-whisper. "The arm of the law must have been pretty confining, honey. You've been gone a long time."

Helene pinched Sepha's arm playfully. "Stop picking on your

roommate. Bill would be lucky to get away before daylight if you were out there."

"You can say that again," said Sepha with a sigh. "That big muscle-bound oaf really sends me. I hope Frances will pass him on to me when she gets tired of him, as she will."

The general laughter that followed seemed almost like a signal. Philbin and Burke made their excuses and departed for the guest wing. Harbin stalked off to John Ong's suite. A few moments later, the ladies were undressing for the night in their respective rooms.

Frances waited until she was sure that Sepha was sound asleep before she slipped out and made her way past Harbin's suite in her bare feet. She went down the stairs to the door on that side of the wing, locked it and returned.

The move had been planned to seal off Harbin's side of the wing and force anyone who visited his quarters to use the door on the side of the wing occupied by Frances and Sepha. If it worked, it would give Frances and Malone an opportunity to observe whomever might enter or leave during the night: she from her balcony and he from the poolhouse, where he was stationed.

Frances eased her way through the bedroom where Sepha was sleeping, onto the balcony and closed the french doors softly behind her. She lighted a cigarette. The answering flare from the poolhouse reassured her.

A subdued murmur from Harbin's suite caused her to stiffen abruptly. She heard Lola's voice, then Harbin's placating tones. There was a lengthy period of low-pitched communication, followed by silence.

After another lapse of time she heard what sounded like a cautiously closed door and light footsteps. The lights were extinguished in Harbin's room.

Frances signed in exasperation. Lola's libido had tossed a monkey-wrench into at least part of her well-laid plans. She had obviously unlocked the door on Harbin's side of the wing to reach his quarters. This would enable others to use the same entrance and escape both her vigil and that of Malone.

The lights flashed on again in Harbin's bedroom a short time later, at the sound of loud knocking. Philbin's angry voice boomed out.

"You filthy swine. To add insult to injury, you're cheating on Lisa."

"My private life is none of your goddam business" she heard Harbin reply, his voice rising. "There's a limit to how much stupid interference a man can take." It wasn't too difficult to interpret the muffled sounds that followed. She heard Harbin howl as though in pain.

Frances decided to change her base of operations. The flare of

her lighter brought an answering flash from Malone. Slipping through the bedroom she entered the hall and descended the stairs.

Malone was at her side almost instantly. He whispered, "No one has come through this door. What's up?"

Frances answered in guarded tones. "Someone unlocked the door on the opposite side. We'll have to make a few changes. You slip around and watch the opposite door and I'll keep an eye on this one from the poolhouse."

She found the waiting tedious until a tall, wide-shouldered figure rounded the corner of the house on Malone's side of the wing and walked toward the beach.

There was a sound of a sputtering motor. She waited until Malone had joined her in front of the house before heading for the beach. They could see the outline of a small motor launch making its way through the surf to the sea.

"He passed me. It was Philbin," said Malone. "That guy must be as strong as an ox to pull that skiff into the sea by himself. What do we do now?"

"Let's give Harbin ten minutes and then have a look."

They sat on the sand. Frances snuggled up to the detective, linking her arm in his. He sighed happily.

"That was the shortest ten minutes on record," he complained as Frances arose.

They traversed the space between the beach and the house and ascended the stairs to find the door to Harbin's quarters unlocked. Malone opened it cautiously. The lights were on. They stood for a moment, gazing at the figure sprawled, face down, on the carpet. A revolver was clutched in Harbin's right hand and there was a rust-red patch of color on the rug.

Malone lifted the head of the sprawled figure gently, then felt for a pulse. "He has a bullet hole in his throat and he is very dead," he said quietly.

Frances bent over and scrutinized the revolver barrel carefully without touching it or the body. She pointed to faint abrasions at the end of the barrel. "Look at this, Bill. Our murderer used a silencer, then placed the gun in Harbin's hand. The markings on

the gun barrel are unmistakable."

Malone whistled softly. "So that was what Gillet was hinting at when he said Mr. Ong couldn't have shot himself. I'll bet he found the same markings on Mr. Ong's pistol."

Frances nodded soberly. "That's the devious criminal mind for you," she said. "Two meticulously planned murders made to look like suicide, perfect to the last macabre detail—and an obvious clue left for the police."

"He certainly isn't too bright," Malone said. "Nobody but a fool would run away like Philbin did. I suppose his story will be that he decided to get an early start for their fishing excursion. He should have taken Burke along as an alibi if he wanted that dodge to hold up in court."

Malone started for the telephone. "I'll call headquarters and send out an A.P.B. for Philbin," he said, his voice grim.

Frances Ivy's restraining hand on his arm halted him. "Philbin didn't kill Harbin," she said. "Come with me."

Malone followed uncertainly. As they arrived at the foot of the stairs she gripped his arm again.

"Don't be startled," she whispered. "if someone comes popping out of the bushes. Unless my operative is a poor tail, he should be staked out along here somewhere."

Frances flicked her cigarette lighter briefly. A man left the concealment of adjacent shrubbery, flashed an answering beam with a flashlight and walked toward them.

"In there," he said softly, pointing to the annex where slivers of light seeped through venetian blinds.

The trio cautiously and silently ascended a flight of stairs. Malone tried the door to the lighted room. It was locked. He took out a batch of keys and tried several before one eased the door open.

No one was visible in the room as they stepped inside, but they could see articles of clothing and an open briefcase on one of the room's twin-beds. Sounds of running water could be heard through a closed door.

Malone walked to the bed and picked up a pair of discolored gloves. He examined the powder stains and blotches on the leather and nodded grimly as Frances reached into the open briefcase and swiftly riffled through its contents.

Sergeant Malone strode to the bathroom door and threw it open. There was a moment of silence, then an indignant bellow. Walter Tremont appeared at the door, with a large bath towel draped around his middle.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" he blustered. "How dare you burst in on me? I'll have you broken for this."

He caught sight of Frances go-

ing through his briefcase. Malone blocked his path as he started toward her. She withdrew her hand. A small but deadly looking silencer nestled in its palm.

Malone grunted. "That does it. I arrest you for the murder of Tom Harbin," he said to Tremont, bundling the barrister back into the bathroom.

"Bring me this guy's clothes," he called to Frances Ivy's operative.

Tremont had seemingly regained some of his customary composure. As Malone hustled him toward the hall door, he straightened angrily and glared at the detective.

"What the devil do you think you're doing?" he demanded. "If Tom Harbin is dead, I had nothing to do with it. I drove in from the airport not more than five minutes ago."

Frances motioned to her operative. "Mr. Collier, tell us what you've been doing during the past few days, under my directions."

Collier cleared his throat importantly. "I've been tailing Mr. Tremont ever since Mr. Ong's funeral, in accordance with your instructions. I came down from New York this morning on the same plane he took. He picked up a U-Drive-It car at Miami International Airport. So did I. I followed and watched him check in at the Sandpiper Motel, between Sunny Isles and Surfside, about a mile north of here.

"He stayed in his room until about three hours ago, when he drove his car to a side street two blocks away, parked it and walked here. He came into this room and turned on the lights. I watched him leave about a half-hour ago. He walked up the path and entered the door I saw you and this gentleman come out of. He came back through the same door about ten minutes ago and returned to this room."

Tremont sneered. "No court of law will accept that sort of flimsy evidence. It's pitch dark outside. I'll make all of you a laughing stock if you go through with this arrest. What possible motive would I have had for killing Tom Harbin? He was not only an associate but a close friend. I just finished lining up the chairmanship of John Ong's company for him."

"Take him away, Bill," said Frances. "I've got plenty of evidence to prove motive."

She instructed Collier to accompany the Sergeant and his prisoner to police headquarters. "You can drive them there in your rented car," she said. "My Mercedes is pretty small. Thanks for a fine job, Mr. Collier. Please report to my office in New York after you fly back."

Turning to Malone she said: "I'm going to grab a couple of hours' sleep. I'd advise you to do the same after you send the medical examiner and arrange for the

body to be removed to the police morgue. Please caution them not to awaken the household. I don't want to break the news to the others until they've had a good night's rest. I'd appreciate it if you could come back around ten a.m. Try to come alone. I want you to know the final score before your boss gets in the act."

VIII

FRANCES IVY waited until nine a.m. before phoning Lola's room. She said: "Honey, will you come down to the drawing room as soon as you've had breakfast? I've asked Mathews to round up the rest. We've got something very important that must be discussed."

A puzzled Sepha Fordyce downed tea and crumpets and dressed hurriedly at her bidding.

Lola Ong was the last to arrive. She looked around at the assemblage. "Where are the rest?" she asked sleepily.

"Jack Philbin left early this morning on a fishing trip," said Frances Ivy. "I'm afraid Tom Harbin's whereabouts will come as a shock to all of you. The police have his body. He was murdered last night."

Burke's face turned ashen. Helene looked startled. Sepha gave a tiny squeak. Lola stared at the speaker with horror written in every lineament of her features.

"Are you joking?" she finally said.

"I'm afraid not, dear. Mr. Harbin was found in his room with a bullet wound in his neck and a revolver clutched in his hand."

Lola Ong tried to restrain an involuntary sob. She bit her lips and made a visible effort to regain her composure.

Burke looked at Frances Ivy curiously. "Why do you say he was murdered? Doesn't the revolver you saw in his hand make suicide more plausible?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Burke," she said.

Frances reached into her handbag and took out a cylindrical object. Holding it up to view, she said, "I planted this tape recorder under the unused twin-bed in Tom Harbin's quarters while the rest of you were having your brandies last night. I was setting a trap for the murderer of John Ong. I didn't foresee that the killer would strike again.

"Before I run this recording," Frances went on, "I want to explain something. I plan to turn this evidence over to the police, but I want all of you to hear it first, so that you will be prepared for questioning when the police arrive."

She gestured toward Malone. "Bill is here as a trusted friend," she explained.

They all started at the click of a switch. There was a period of silence finally broken by a sound

as of knuckles on wood. A shuffling noise, then a voice.

The voice was Walter Tremont's.

Frances stole a look at Malone. He was frowning in obvious puzzlement. A peek at Lola's suddenly raised head brought a sudden lump to Frances' throat. The affection and gratitude on Lola's face was more than ample payment for the erasure she had performed on the tape.

The group straightened as Tremont's cheery, "Well, here I am, right on schedule," was followed by Harbin's voice.

"You double-crossing ugly son. I polled six members of the board and every last one of them said you asked them to vote for you, as chairman. Didn't it even occur to you that I could reach them by telephone?"

They heard Tremont say soothingly, "Now, Tom, don't go off half-cocked. Those characters were pulling your leg. It's all set for you. They just wanted to make you squirm a little before they cast their vote."

"Do you actually think I'm stupid enough to fall for that line?" Harbin retorted. "I'll admit I've been pretty stupid, though. It just dawned on me, tonight, how John Ong was killed. You came ashore and shot him while I was sleeping it off on our boat. No wonder you insisted on mixing the drinks for the gang after the meeting. You gave John knockout drops, so he would be a sitting duck and it's a hundred to one that the drinks you fixed for me after we anchored offshore were loaded. I remember

going out like a light. I was still woozy when you woke me up after we docked at the hotel."

Tremont's voice, very much under control, broke in. "You're right about one thing, Tom. You are stupid. An intelligent man would have gone to the police with that theory of yours instead of tipping me off. With me arrested you'd be a cinch to grab the top job in the company."

Harbin's voice was smug. "Now, *you* are being stupid. If they indicted you for John Ong's murder it would mean chaos. You hold the financial strings for the entire setup. I prefer to be an accessory to murder. The price of my silence is the chairmanship. From now on, I'll be cracking the whip and you'll be taking orders."

Tremont's laugh sounded sincere. "Okay, boss. I know when I'm licked. Let's shake hands on the deal."

A startled cry from Harbin was abruptly choked off. The listeners heard a popping sound and a dull thud. There were rustling noises, the closing of a door, then silence.

Frances Ivy turned off the recording. "That's it, friends. It tells the story."

She handed the spool to Malone. "You noticed, of course, that I erased Philbin's voice. The tape made it sound as though he was killing Harbin when he was merely roughing him up and there was only a faint apologetic pop when Tremont shot him with the silencer attached to the revolver. Your boss might have thought that I reversed the order of their arrival in Harbin's room by changing the tape. As you know, a good technician could do just that. You and I know what actually happened, so why complicate things?"

Malone nodded. "I agree. That silencer in Tremont's briefcase, his powder-stained and blood-spattered gloves and our testimony should be enough to convince a coroner's jury. The tape, in its present form, establishes motive and opportunity. That's all that's necessary."

A knock on the door created a distraction. Mathews coughed raspingly outside the door before ushering in Lieutenant Gillet. They all tensed as the detective walked in and seated himself beside his assistant.

Gillet listened impassively as Malone related the events of the preceding night. He dropped his attitude of boredom when he heard the tape recording.

When the tape had run its course, he shot a quizzical look at Frances. "Recordings are not admissible as court evidence," he said, "but that and the evidence we have should be enough to get an indictment."

He looked steadily at the redhead. "I wish you would make Miami your permanent headquarters," he said. "With you around

I could play golf every day and still come up with a better record of arrests and indictments than anyone on the force."

They all relaxed as Lieutenant Gillet leaned back in his chair and nodded. "I don't go on official duty until noon," he said to Lola Ong. "If you would care to offer me a drink I'd like to speak with Miss Ivy unofficially for a few moments."

Lola signaled Mathews. Gillet waited until they all had been served and he had sampled his drink before addressing Frances Ivy.

"Now, young lady, would you mind telling me when you first suspected that Walter Tremont had murdered John Ong?"

Frances looked at him and smiled. "I thought it was out of character for an attorney of Tremont's standing to make a banal statement about wanting to be a murder suspect when you asked him if he would submit to a paraffine test. It made me feel that he was deliberately trying to eliminate himself as a suspect and such an attempt seemed pointless, unless he had killed John Ong."

Frances Ivy paused. "Also, I saw that the hands he held up so eagerly for inspection were lily-white and his nose sunburned. Only a very vain man would wear gloves while fishing under a sun hot enough to redden his nose. I think you will agree that only an egomaniac would kill a man, place the gun in his hand and blithely assume that he could palm it off as suicide."

"I'll buy that," said Lieutenant Gillet. "But what convinced you that John Ong had *not* committed suicide?"

"The same things that convinced you. The marks on the barrel of the pistol that indicated a silencer had been used, plus the trajectory of the bullet."

Gillet rose with a happy sigh. "Forget your vacation Bill and come back to work. I'd like to use you on a couple of tough cases before your exposure to F. B. Ivy wears off."

Coming Soon:

A NEW *FRANCES BASCOMB IVY* STORY

By CHARLES VENTURA

MACED
MODEL

SLEPT IN THE CARPORT

When a brilliant man turns to crime the world in general sleeps less well at night. And Carl Van Water specialized in nightmares.

by JOHN JAKES

THE DISASTROUS climax to Carl Van Water's career at Parks, Paris, Day & Steiner occurred on the Tuesday he made his presentation to the plans board. He presented the so-called secret project upon which he'd been expending so much energy the previous weeks.

I'd heard about the project in general terms during our rides in and out of the city together on the 8:02 and 5:49. But though we were friends—strong ones until the time Carl's wife died suddenly a few months before that utterly astonishing plans board meeting—he had not told me the nature of the project, nor had he told anyone else.

By the end of the plans board meeting, I could experience only a feeling of sick disbelief and dismay. The shock of what happened even deadened some of my resentment at Carl's having gone over my head, and that of his supervisor, Gunther, straight to Bruce Paris for a place on the agenda.

"Gentlemen," Carl said after he rose, "I would like to offer a proposal that PPD&S establish what we might call a Teen Marketing Division."

Carl then distributed the study

he had prepared—multilithed and bound at his own expense—a full six inches thick. There were copies for everyone. I glanced through mine uneasily.

While he introduced his subject, my mind wandered. I was piqued that Carl had never said a word to me, or even requested my help in getting to the plans board. I knew that he was not well thought of currently by Bruce Paris. And in what he was doing, I sensed the riding of a hobby horse, for two reasons, neither of which was particularly healthy for our shop since PPD&S is essentially a conservative operation.

Carl was then 37, and believed himself a relative failure. His supervisor, Gunther, was 52, firmly entrenched as our Director of Marketing Services, and had the Ph.D. Carl had only completed a year toward his doctorate in sociology. So I saw in Carl's presentation an attempt to advance laterally, so to speak, out from under Gunther's thumb.

I also thought I saw the reason Carl was so very nearly fanatical about the possibility of maximizing the promotion of products to the youth market.

Shortly after his wife Betty died, while he was still focusing morbidly on his own age when he should have been snapping out of his depression, he quit his position with the Youth Club in the city. The Club and his secret project had occupied most of his spare time prior to that.

Twice a week, Carl acted as a counsellor at the Club, located in one of the city's worst slums. One night, three of the boys with whom he'd been working showed up late, drunk on beer and demanding money.

When Carl tried to reason with them, they got tough and beat him up, then fled. He told me the next morning that the long train ride home was the worst of his life.

Carl had always felt that working with the Club served as a kind of sop to morality, counteracting his submerged feelings of guilt about selling the public our clients' products. And he and Betty had never had children.

My only thought was that Carl should have turned his oratory, not his fists, on those boys. Two days later, still feeling bitter and depressed, he resigned from his post at the Club.

From then until the plans board meeting, he seemed to grow more and more exhausted. He was banking everything on his project, and losing sleep over it. One day he returned from an extremely long lunch, obviously having had too much to drink. He bumped into Bruce Paris, the president of the shop, outside the elevator, and Bruce came to see me about it. I tried to get the message across to Carl that he had better slow down or he'd be out of a job.

I merely succeeded in provoking a kind of violent outburst on Carl's part. At one point he actually said, "I think the whole damn world is against me now." He included, by inference, me.

A week later came the plans board session.

As usual, Carl was very good when he pulled out all the stops in a presentation, even if what he said didn't make too much sense. Unfortunately Carl's research was never up to the emotional level of the presentation proper; it had always bedazzled the clients, though.

At the beginning of Carl's Teen Marketing Division pitch, he was in his usual high oratorical style, a pseudoevangelist delivery. I was sitting close enough to detect that he had been bolstered up by several martinis. And, when I managed to focus at last on what he said, I even found myself admitting the idea did have some merit.

He had compiled reams and reams of statistics on how many young people were coming into the marketplace every year. He said 25% of the population would be under twenty in a few years. The figures on their disposable income were astonishing.

Unfortunately, it was a fact of life that PPD&S, like so many solid shops, was a follower, not a leader. We could not deny privately that he was right—that the adolescent population was booming; that it had a potential power as an income group (and as a menace to life and limb in certain locales, I could insert parenthetically).

But it fell upon me, as Executive VP and one of the Account Supervisors, to decide privately that to devote agency capital to a special department designed to study adolescent buying habits, attitudes and expanding influence, was premature.

During Carl's talk, everyone looked very sober and fair-minded except Gunther. He managed to get off a sidewise glance and a audible snicker to Bruce Paris. Gunther had a tendency to be a bit of a boor at times. Maybe having the Ph.D. did it.

Carl Van Water looked stricken long before he finished.

Then Bruce stood up. "Carl, we'd like to thank you for putting in all this work. You can be sure the agency will take the matter under consideration."

Carl appeared haggard. Apparently he was counting heavily—too much—on the proposal being met with enthusiasm:

"What's the matter with you silly, equivocating ugly sons? Can't you recognize a damn sound idea when you see it? You've got all the facts right in front of you. Take a vote."

Bruce Paris scowled. "Carl, I'm afraid—"

"Vote," said Carl. "Right now."

Carl sat in the visitor's chair while we voted it down, 9-0. Then he stood up. He started shouting, "You stupid, narrow-minded shop-window clothes-horses. You couldn't recognize a good idea if—"

It became my task as his friend—friendship sometimes extracts a high price—to get him out of the room. I took him to his office and had no chance to say anything, because he burst into tears. I left him alone. He was not on the 5:49 home that evening.

The next week was absolutely rotten. We learned we were in danger of losing the Timepiece account. There was going to be a week-long flap while we prepared a whole new campaign for presentation.

On top of that, Bruce Paris looked in. "Lou," he said, staring at the end of his cigarette, "I had a talk with Carl this morning. I asked him to look around."

"Looking around" is the polite term for a semi-firing. A man can be reasonably sure of the paychecks coming in until he finds another position. Well, I thought, Carl should have known better. If a man will fly off the handle in front of his associates, then he couldn't play effectively on the team. Besides, I had my own position to protect.

I said nothing to Carl on the train that night. He brought it up himself. Actually he seemed more light-hearted than he had for weeks, though there was a rather strange, bright glint in his eyes when he looked at me.

"I wanted to find another spot anyway."

"Oh? I thought we talked about that once, and you felt otherwise."

"Well, what the hell choice do I have now?" Again that strange glint. "Besides, I'd like to be among people who listen to ideas and react to them for a change."

I switched to another topic. "Carl, are you still planning to come over for drinks and dinner Friday?"

"Of course. That is, if you and Gerda will still have me."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"I want to see that play. I need to get my mind off all this—" He hesitated, waving at the expensive white suburban houses flashing by outside the train window. "—all this smug crap."

Several days before the plans board blow-up, my wife Gerda and I had invited Carl over for dinner, hoping the outing would do him some good. We planned to attend a play at Ravenwood Park too. The Park was quite near both our homes—Carl's property actually backed up to it—and when Betty was alive, Gerda and I had gone at least three or four times a summer with the Van Waters. A concert, a jazz group, a play—

whatever the management booked for the series.

The current attraction was a touring version of a new verse drama which had drawn good notices but a relatively poor box-office the preceding winter. It was called *The Road to Persepolis.* The actor who played Alexander the Great was supposed to be top-flight.

The only variation Gerda and I planned was for afterward. We would have cocktails and dinner first at our place, but instead of going out along the footpath to Carl's for a nightcap on his patio afterward, we'd return to our home again. I had thought he might not be too enthusiastic now, but I was wrong.

Somehow, I held off mentioning Carl's firing to Gerda. I didn't tell her until after Carl had gone home that Friday night.

The evening had been a relative success. The play was excellent. The actor in the lead, apparently selected to match Alexander the Great's short stature, had a powerful voice and an electric personality, a bit remarkable in so small a person. He drew six curtain calls all by himself.

Though Carl was a trifle high when he finished the nightcap at our place, he was by no means drunk, and still seemed in a pleasant enough mood. After he had started his walk home, I told Gerda the bad news.

"Well, Lou," she said, "whatever happened at the agency, we —and I mean you too—must stick by him. You ought to do what you can to see that he locates the right sort of position."

"You're right, of course," I said. My anger at Carl had long ago vanished. "Just because a man fouls up at one shop doesn't mean he won't do a crackerjack job for another."

"Can you help him?"

"Of course. I'll make some phone calls first thing next week."

On Monday, both in the morning and the evening, Carl seemed positively brimming with cheer on the train. It's true we didn't get in much conversation. He told me why on the morning run, as he held up a thick book in a plain library binding:

"I picked this up Saturday. It's a biography of the subject of that play we saw."

"Alexander the Great?"

"Yes. It's damn fascinating."

He spent most of both trips reading. That was quite unlike him. Usually Carl's reading had been confined to professional articles or books. But it was good to see that something was taking his mind off all his troubles at last.

By Wednesday I had made enough phone calls to arrange two interviews for Carl with good, solid shops. When I dropped in to tell him, he thanked me politely enough, and noted down the information, but he didn't seem overly interested. On the train home that night, he was deep in a different book.

"What's that one about?" I asked.

"Oh, the same subject. The Greek." He smiled.

That was about the extent of our conversation.

Thursday of the following week, Carl failed to show up for one of the interviews I had arranged. By five o'clock my anger had peaked and cooled again, and I felt under reasonably good control when I went to his office to talk to him.

He wasn't in his office. Nor was he on the 5:49.

He was not on the train the following morning either. No one at the agency had heard from him. I checked his house on the way home from the station that night. It was locked up and the car was gone.

"Gerda," I said that evening, "I'm a bit worried about Carl." I described the circumstances.

"Are you sure he's completely disappeared?"

"Completely. No word to anyone."

"It isn't like him, Lou."

"No, it certainly isn't."

"If he doesn't turn up by—oh, perhaps the middle or the end of next week, Lou—well, I'd think seriously about telephoning the police. Something might have happened to him."

"Rather than the departure being voluntary, you mean? Yes, I suppose you're right."

Carl seemed to have vanished. His house was deserted all weekend. I was busy the early part of the next week, and it was Wednesday when I decided to get in touch with the authorities. Before I did, the phone rang, about midmorning.

"Lou? This is me."

"Yes, Gerda?"

"I hate to bother you, dear, but the mailman just brought the delivery. There's a long envelope addressed to you, and it looks like Carl's handwriting."

"Then he's all right. Save the letter, I'll read it tonight."

I did, having held off phoning the police. I read it once, twice, half a dozen times. It made no sense at all, unless I accepted the theory that all of Carl's misfortunes had placed him in dire need of mental help.

The letter was postmarked from the city, but otherwise had no return address. This is what it said:

Dear Lou:

Just a note to tell you not to worry about me. I'm all right, though I won't be coming back to the house or PPD&S, at least not in the way you expect. Pls. excuse the handwriting. There's no typewriter in this room and I bought a little something to drink.

You and Gerda can't help what you are, but like all the rest, somebody is going to have to pay. A man just doesn't see his life smashed up by others and stand still, you know.

It's funny how a little thing can change a man's whole outlook. When I left your place the other night, though I tried not to show it, I was at absolute rock bottom.

I walked home, slightly pie-eyed but not falling down, and as I turned up the drive, I saw, of all crazy things, a couple of people in togas stumbling around in the darkness out by the patio.

It turned out to be that red-haired fellow who played the leading role in the play. He had a girl with him, the one who played the Persian slave. Both of them still had their makeup on, and full costumes, too. What happened was, there was some sort of cast party after the performance. The leading man and the girl had a few too many—a typical failing, wouldn't you say?—and wandered out the footpath and across the property line to my place.

It was quite an experience. The fellow was kind of loud and show-offy, but I was just drunk enough to invite them both in. The girl curled up and went to sleep while I sat there mixing highballs for Alexander the Great. I must have told him everything you merciless cruds at the shop have done to me lately, because the actor kept shaking his head, as though it wasn't of any great significance. Finally he stood up and waved that plumed helmet he wore, and jumped up on the couch and declaimed something like, "At age thirty-two, Alexander of Macedon had conquered the known world. What have you done lately that's really important?"

After a while, the girl woke up and she and the actor went outside for some air. About half an hour later, I discovered both of them passed out. It's a strange experience to have Alexander the Great sleep in your carport all night.

It was an even stranger experience, H. Louis Ringle, executive-vice-president-and-all-that-crap-old-pal, to realize he was right. I am 37 years old, and I have a lot of catching up to do.

As I say, don't worry about me. You'll be hearing from me in a

few years. You and all the rest.
C.

GERDA AND I discussed that letter again and again in the days and weeks that followed. Our conclusion was inescapable. Just on the strength of those last two sentences, Carl, wherever he was, obviously was a sick person.

I didn't know what to do with the letter, actually. I hesitated to go to the police to suggest they look for Carl. I hesitated to get involved with the police at all.. Besides, wasn't Carl old enough to take care of himself? I had grown just a bit weary of his self-pity and his obvious certainty that he had somehow been victimized.

In addition, I had no rational basis for what I construed to be Carl's unbalanced state. The letter sounded threatening, yet it contained nothing specific. I decided that the best thing I could do was forget about Carl Van Water altogether. After all, I had my family and job to worry about. If Carl wanted to be a neurotic, he would have to do it on his own. I was through.

So I tucked the letter away and did nothing.

Nothing, that is, until nearly six months later. Then, I got it out again.

The Ad Club meeting is always held on a Wednesday evening. I had been invited to speak on how PPD&S had saved the Timepiece account the preceding year. I had several drinks after the speech, and it was 11:15 before I realized it. I caught a taxi since the last train pulled out at 11:35. It was raining heavily.

The area outside the station was pretty well deserted when the cab let me out. I started for the main doors. Suddenly two youths accosted me.

"Okay, sweetheart, let's see how much you're carryin', huh?"

They had been hiding in the shadows behind one of the pillars. One was a white boy, the other a Negro. Neither could have been older than 14 or 15. They wore those satin gang-type jackets with a name sewn on the back. One jacket was black, the other dark green. The Negro boy had a switchblade knife.

"Hurry it up, whitey," he said to me.

I didn't argue with them. I gave them all the money I had, $57. They knocked me down, the white boy kicked me in the stomach and they ran. I was barely able to stand up and make the train.

All the next day, I was totally incapable of concentrating on work. I decided I was just their accidental victim, the first person who happened to come along. But something else kept disturbing me. It was Carl's letter, which I had brought along in my pocket from home.

I had the librarian dig out all

she could find on crime statistics during recent months, because somehow or other, I got a rather wild idea in connection with what had happened to me. I thought I'd remembered a particular piece in the paper, and I located it easily among the newspaper files the librarian delivered to my desk.

The article in question was the quarterly report by the metropolitan police department covering crime in the city in January through March. During those three months—traditionally quiet, relatively, because of the incidence of cold weather, snow and so forth—major crimes rose 23%, as against an increase of 9% in the similar period the preceding year. The national average rise for January-March was typically low.

The statistic which really unnerved me was the one about the age brackets of local offenders. Crimes committed by young people —youthful gangsters was my term —in the age bracket 14-19 rose an astonishing 41%, as opposed to a 6% rise at the same time a year ago. It was the most gigantic increase in the city's history.

I told myself the idea was fantastic. Besides, there was nothing I could do about it without being labeled a crackpot.

But I couldn't help associating certain things: Carl Van Water's studies in the untapped potential of the youth market; his obvious

hostility toward people of his own age, class, and income bracket as a result of what happened to him; his demonstrated ability to work up an emotional fervor in a group of listeners even though his subject matter did not quite make sense.

I could close my eyes and see him, with his good vocabulary and knowledge of persuasion techniques, exhorting a group of semi-moronic, criminally inclined slum youngsters, like some modern Fagin.

Then of course there was that remarkable scene described in his letter, coupled with the warning that I would be 'hearing from him' in 'a few years,' that I and 'all the rest' would 'pay.'

And there were the books he read, about Alexander.

But none of it would have upset me had I not kept seeing a picture in my mind while I tried to stare at the newspaper clips and Carl's letter spread out on my desk. It was a picture that had become part of me during the attack outside the train station.

Those two boys who attacked me had been facing away from me as

they ran. So I had gotten a good look at the jackets they wore. Obviously they were members of rival gangs, but they were working together.

I didn't know a great deal about such hooligans beyond what I had read in the papers, but I did know that the names of their gangs always ran to simple-minded things like 'Sharks' or 'Dragons' or 'Commandos.'

So the picture that kept torturing me was the picture of those boys as they ran. The name sewn on the back of one of the jackets was 'Hoplites,' and the name on the other was 'Macedonians.'

I'm afraid we may all be hearing from Carl Van Water soon.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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The September 1965 Number Will Be The

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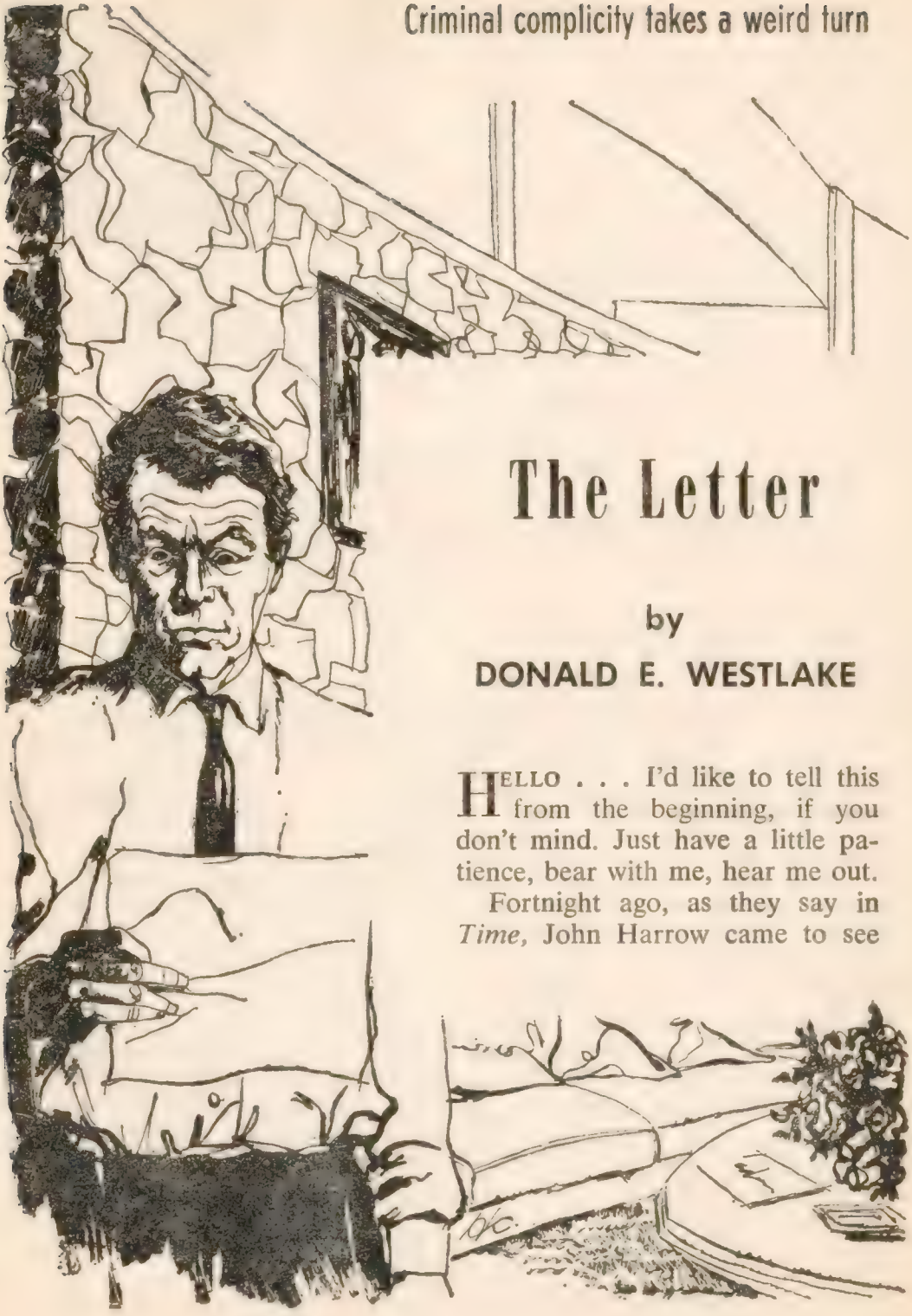


The Letter

by

DONALD E. WESTLAKE

HELLO . . . I'd like to tell this from the beginning, if you don't mind. Just have a little patience, bear with me, hear me out.

Fortnight ago, as they say in *Time,* John Harrow came to see

me. I didn't recognize him at first, for we'd last seen each other eight years ago, when we'd left college to go our widely diverging ways and in the intervening years he'd changed, as we all must. He was heavier now, and his dry brown hair was even drier and beginning to recede. From the look of his wrinkled suit, stained tie and cracked-leather shoes, the last eight years hadn't done very well by John Harrow. But then, we all have our troubles. Mine divorced me two years ago.

"Long time no see," he said, along with other inanities. I offered him a drink, and he took Scotch. We sat in the living room, and talked about the good old days on campus while I tried to figure out what he wanted from me. After eight years, it was hard to believe he was just dropping by for a friendly chat. If it was a touch he had in mind, I had my hardluck story all prepared—on automatic pilot, so to speak.

After a while, he looked admiringly around the room. "You've done very well for yourself," he said. "But then, we were all pretty sure you would."

"I appreciate the better things," I told him. So it *was* a touch?

No, it wasn't. He hemmed and hawed some more, and downed a second drink, and finally got to the point. "What I'm here for, really," he said, "has to do with a situation which has just recently come up. I need advice and assistance from someone I can trust."

Was it some sort of financial 'opportunity' he was bringing me, I wondered. From the looks of him, it would be on the level of a used-car lot or a rundown diner. His experience and my capital, the argument would go, and we could both become millionaires.

The hardluck story would take care of that one, too. Not that it would be all that exaggerated. Arlene's alimony was more of a drain than I liked to think about.

"I know it's been a long time since we've seen each other," he went on, "and you're probably thinking I'm here to ask for a loan. But that isn't it."

I looked at him and said nothing.

"I've had my money problems," he confessed. "But I guess you can see that from these duds I've got on."

There was nothing to say to that either, so I just smiled noncommittally.

"But money problems," he said, "are done with, as far as I'm concerned. I've got a chance for the one big score now, and believe me, I'm grabbing it. If you'd had the bad luck and the lousy breaks I've had the last eight years, you'd grab it, too."

"Perhaps," I said. I was beginning to get the idea that whatever his little scheme was that he wanted my assistance on, it was less

than legal. If he had some mad idea I was going to drive the getaway car in a bank holdup or something else equally dramatic and foolhardy, he didn't remember me very well. I was a cautious boy, and I grew into a cautious man.

"There's no danger in it for you," he assured me, as though he could read my mind. "And nothing for you to do."

"Nothing at all?"

"All I want," he said, removing a thick business-size white envelope from his inside suitcoat pocket, "is for you to hold on to this letter for me."

He extended it toward me, and politeness forced me to accept it. Hesitating would have been foolish, because I could always hand it back to him.

"You don't have to know what's in it," he said. "In fact, you'd be better off if you didn't know. I just want you to hold it for me, that's all. Sometime in the next month, I'll come back and pick it up again. And I'll give you a thousand dollars, just for keeping it in your possession for a month."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," I said.

"I'm not asking you to understand." He was still polite, still the petitioner requesting a favor, but there was also a trace of impatience in him. I had the feeling that he had some overall plan of which this was only the smallest part, and was in haste to have it settled and done with, so he could get on with the rest of his scheme.

"I picked you," he said, "because you're the most trustworthy person I know. Back in school, you were always the guy that could be relied on. I need somebody I can trust, and I'm willing to pay you."

"Let me understand this." I hefted the letter, which was bulky and rather heavy. "Let me get this straight," I said. "You want me to hold onto this letter for you for one month. At the end of the month, you will return and I will give it back to you. In payment for keeping it in my possession—unread, I assume—you will pay me the sum of one thousand dollars. Is that correct?"

"Right," he said. He nodded, obviously more pleased with me now.

I said, "Is that all there is to it? I am to get a thousand dollars merely for keeping a letter under lock and key in my desk?"

"There is just one thing more," he said, and his expression was that of the salesman trying to decide how to tell me—without losing the sale—that the car he was trying to palm off on me had once been dropped over a cliff.

"I thought there might be a little bit more," I said.

"It will expose you to no risk," he assured me.

"Still," I said, "I'd like to hear about it."

"Sure." He leaned forward, earnest and confidential. "I told you I'd be back inside of a month," he said. "Now—what happens if I'm *not* back within that preiod of time?"

"I really don't know."

He tapped the letter, which I still held rather unwillingly in my lap. "You mail that letter," he told me, "to the Police Commissioner."

"I do *what?*"

"If I don't come back within a month," he said, "it'll be because something has happened to me, and the police ought to know about it. That letter will explain to them precisely what happened to me. It's my insurance, so to speak. Do you understand now why I wanted a man I could absolutely trust?"

"There's something wrong here," I said. "You came to me because, you say, I am the most trustworthy person you know, and I thank you for the compliment. But trustworthy, in essence, means honest. And I'm pretty sure this project you're engaged on is anything but honest. So how can you expect *me* to become a party to it?"

"What's dishonest?" He seemed actually shocked, as though in some unwitting fashion I had insulted him. "Name me what's dishonest," he said, a trifle belligerently. "I ask you to hold a letter for me. There's a law against that?"

"Well, no. But—"

"Is there anything dishonest about mailing a letter? Or about giving the police information about something criminal that has taken place?"

"I grant you," I said, "that my part in this operation appears to be absolutely legal. But about your part I have the gravest doubt. In fact, John, I would go so far as to say that I believe you are involved in some kind of blackmail scheme."

"You're right," he said, readily enough. There seemed to be no shame in him. "But if you knew who was involved you'd agree with me there's no moral issue involved. He is one of the lowest, most despicable human beings in the entire—"

"Judge and jury. John?"

"All right, all right. Never mind that. I'm broke, do you understand? For eight years, ever since I got out of college, it's been nothing but one lousy break after another for me. *Nothing* has worked out right. This is my chance, and I intend to take full advantage of it. I've got the goods in that letter, and I'm going to collect, and I don't care if it's honest or dishonest. I came here to ask you to help me. You're trustworthy, I said, and I meant it, and that's why I'm here.

"This is the pitch, right across the plate. My life is in your hands. I don't care if you're something of a stuffed shirt and a bore and all the rest of it. That isn't the point. The point is, I had to put my life

in somebody's hands. You see what I mean? You follow me? I had to put my life in somebody's hands. I looked around at all the people I knew, and all the people I used to know, and I had to find the one guy I could trust with my *life*. You get that? With my *life*."

"Yes, of course. But—"

"Now, wait a minute. Let me finish. I'm giving you a hell of a responsibility, one you didn't ask for, one you don't have to accept if you don't want to because we were never that good friends anyway."

"Arlene said all that, too," I said.

It threw him off-stride. "Said what?"

"She said I was a stuffed shirt, and a bore. My ex-wife. Arlene."

"I'm trying to tell you, if you'll listen, that isn't the *point*. It isn't even whether we're the closest friends in the world. It isn't friendship at all. We could be strangers, and it would still be the same thing. I'm handing you my life, on a silver platter, and I'm asking you what you're going to do with it. Are you going to guard it? Or toss it back?"

When he'd finished, the echoes of all he'd so forcefully said seemed to hang a moment suspended in the air over us. Within, I was hearing other echoes. Things that Arlene had said to me. Things that the lawyer had said, and the judge. Things about my character. I was honest, they had all agreed—and trustworthy. But I was also cold. I had been accused many times of lacking warm human feelings, or at least of not being able to express them. I was too much of a perfectionist, and had all the vices which complement the virtues with which I was so well-endowed.

What was John Harrow asking of me, after all? Only that I put my virtues to a warm and human use.

"All right," I said. "I'll do it."

"Fine," he said. "I never for a moment doubted that you would."

"I'll hold the letter for a month," I said. "And I hope to see you at the end of that time."

He was suddenly brisk and businesslike, but smiling in a cheerful way. "About the details," he said.

"You'll give the letter only to me. If someone else calls and says I asked him to pick up the letter, tell him you don't know what he's talking about. Even if I phone you, and tell you to give the letter to somebody else—don't do it. You're to deliver the letter only to me, in person. Is that clear?"

"Yes," I said. "But there's something I've got to know. Is there likely to be—violence of any kind?"

He shook his head. "No danger of that. You're a solid citizen; they wouldn't dare touch you. Besides, they'd have to be sure of getting their hands on the letter immediately. They'd be in trouble if it turned up in your effects."

"My—my effects?"

"Take my word for it, any violence they resort to will be aimed at me. And that letter's a safeguard. You realize that, don't you?"

"I suppose so," I said.

He left then, thanking me a few more times on his way out, and I returned to the book I'd been reading. Re-reading, rather. *Daisy Miller*. Magnificent prose.

That was a fortnight ago. Ten days of silence ensued, days in which I worked as usual at the office. The letter was safely stowed away in a trunk in the attic, in the inside breast-pocket of my old ROTC dress uniform. My life went on as usual, and I had very nearly forgotten John Harrow and his letter when, four days ago, I received the telephone call.

It was about ten o'clock at night. I was preparing a cup of instant coffee in the kitchen between chapters of *The American* when the phone rang. I turned off the gas under the kettle and returned to the living room.

It was John Harrow. I recognized his voice at once. He said, "Listen. You remember that letter I gave you?"

I said, "I beg your pardon?" I was mindful of his instructions concerning such a contingency as this.

He said, "The letter, the letter!" He sounded overwrought. "I gave you the letter, remember?"

I said, "Is this a joke?"

He said, "Forget what I told you! They're listening, they've *got* to know."

I said, "Just what are you up to?"

"Tell them you've got the letter!" he shrieked. "Tell them, for God's sake!"

I said, "I haven't the vaguest idea what you're talking about."

I heard just the beginning of a scream, and then the connection was broken. I hung up, returned to the kitchen, and finished preparing my coffee.

That, as I say, was four days ago. In this morning's newspaper I read that the police had recovered John Harrow's body from the

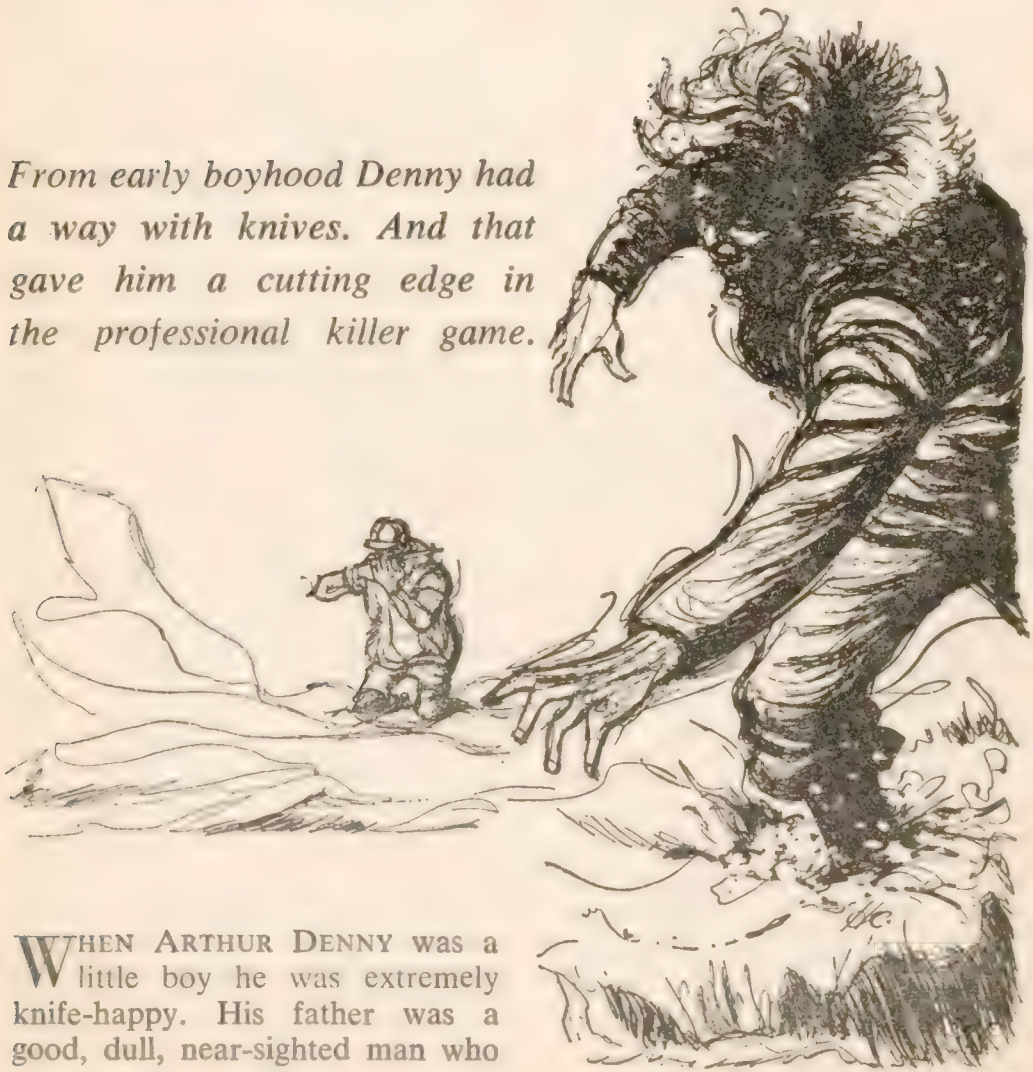
(*Concluded on page 114*)

The Old Pro

by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

From early boyhood Denny had a way with knives. And that gave him a cutting edge in the professional killer game.



WHEN ARTHUR DENNY was a little boy he was extremely knife-happy. His father was a good, dull, near-sighted man who

had never heard of Freud or anything of that sort; but, although he may not have been very smart, neither was he utterly stupid.

He had opened the door with no more in mind than asking his son if he didn't want to listen to the birthday game on the radio. Oscar Denny blinked often, and on seeing the array of knives out on the boy's bedspread, he blinked very rapidly. Arthur had made a gesture towards concealment, but, it being too late, he trained on his father a look which the latter may or may not have been too nearsighted to analyze—alarm, defiance, pride, and a certain smile of the sort which heralds snickers about sex among people of unwholesome outlook.

"Why, Arty—" said Mr. Denny. "Why, Arty—I didn't know you was interested in knives. You like collecting them better than stamps? Well, that's okay, I guess. There was a piece in the paper last month about a man who collected knives and swords from all over the world. If you're interested, I guess I could locate that old Spanish-American War sword of Grampa's for you. Only thing is now, son—I tell you for your own good—it's not a wise policy to have them spread out on the *bed* like that—not *safe*. I'm sure you'll realize that—if you'll just think about it."

"I was just—"

"You ought to have a cabinet to keep them in, and a work-table if you want to spread them out for any reason."

Arty said, "Gee . . ."

His passion, thus patronized, escaped being a clandestine thing with all the latter's possible dangers. His collection grew, and was supplied with everything from whetstones to carrying-cases (Oh, he was made to earn a good part of the money, Oscar Denny saw to that—which wasn't a bad thing for the boy, either), was showed off at local hobby shows and eventually displayed at a museum for a week every year.

Mr. Denny was usually present at such occasions; this good gray man in his good grey suit and a matching vest crossed by watch-chain with elk's tooth emblem was full of protection against the merest thought of any kind of impropriety.

Arthur branched out into other weapons by and by, but everything remained under full control. He had no temptaton to go showing off to questionable friends by shooting at random or at anonymous moving cars, because he was practicing at a regular firing range with older men, sportsmen, respectable as his father. He had no need to hide his affections; it was perfectly natural that he should have a full butcher's kit and cut up venison of his own kill for the family freezer.

The most remarkable thing about his father's wisdom was that

no one, himself included, ever thought of it especially as wisdom.

Arty did well in the army, won all the rifle medals, and was—not surprisingly—selected for commando training, at which he did excellently well. The war ended, however, before he went into actual combat, and the rest of his military career was spent at humdrum guard duties.

"What're you planning to do, Arty?" his father asked, not long after he was discharged. Remember those signs and banners that used to be seen everywhere?—*Welcome Home Angelo—Sam—Norman—Arty*—remember? "College? GI Bill?"

"No, no college."

"Well, that's all right. I never went to college and made out fine just the same. What do you have in mind?"

What Arty had in mind was turning his hobby into a business. And this is what he did. His father owned a downtown building, into which he had put most of his savings, and *Arthur Denny* (which was all the sign said: *Firearms, Cutlery, Sporting Goods*—along with a few skis and things like that) opened up for business on its ground floor.

Business was not spectacular, but it was okay.

"How's your boy making out, Oscar?" more than one customer asked.

"Who, Arty? He's making out fine. I expect to see him a well-to-do man before I die."

This optimism was not justified—for one thing because he, Oscar Denny, died not long afterwards of cancer of the pancreas, having neglected himself too far. And then the whole area was slated for an Urban Renewal project and Arty was bought out and had to close down. He didn't mind much at first, having a better location in mind. But before he could make the move, another business firm which was affected by the project had taken the place he had in mind.

"Sorry, Arthur, but you know how it is in business."

"Oh, yeah. Sure. I'd 've done the same thing."

Which he would have.

The only location he could get which had enough space and so on didn't prove so good and the rent was twice as much. And then a shopping center opened up on the other side of town. It had a super-hardware store with a fuller line of cutlery and guns, as well as a super-sporting goods store with a fuller line of everything else. So Arty's business started going real bad. To top it off, his father's stepsister claimed she had a half-interest in the Denny house. After paying big lawyers' fees, Arty finally had to settle out of court, and he closed his second store.

He said to a friend of his, Eddy Stocky, "All my troubles started with that damned Urban Renewal

project. I'd like to kill that ugly son."

"What ugly son?" Eddy asked.

"That ugly son, Barand, the one who's putting up all these damned Project buildings. They expect me to be loyal to this government, and they take away my property and give it to somebody else? Barand! I had a business going, which would have supported me my whole life—and what have I got now?" And Arty was profane, abusive, and violent in his further comments about Barand.

"Well, I don't blame you," said Eddy. He was a man with a quiet face and few conversational attainments, who ran a string of small candy-tobacco-and-stationery stores which served as fronts for off-track betting and the collection of 'numbers' money. To the crime of illicit gambling he was obliged constantly to add that of bribing the police, and no one who gave much thought to the matter supposed that he was more than a minor member—perhaps only an employee—of a syndicate whose size it was virtually impossible to guess.

Arthur spent much of his time at home, alone in the old family house, watching television, brooding on his dwindling bank account, and keeping in good condition his (collection) (equipment) (stock) (arsenal)—Choose one.

What happened next is perhaps no surprise. A few weeks later he met Eddy again when he went to buy cigarettes.

"Where's Victor?" he asked, referring to the official 'proprietor' of the store.

"Went for coffee. Hey, I want to speak to you Arty," his friend said.

"Yeah."

"Would you take a contract to get rid of Barand."

"Yeah."

It began that simply.

ARNOLD BARAND was a front. The money, the millions and millions in money which were behind the ambitious building project which destroyed Arthur Denny as an independent businessman, had flowed halfway across the country (sources: juke-boxes, cigarette machines, bootlegging, gambling, vice) into the coffer-dam of which Barand was the appointed custodian. And Barand had tried to divert part—too large a part—of this golden flow for himself. This offense proved capital.

Arthur allowed himself the luxury of shattering Barand's spine with one bullet and watching him drag himself, screaming shrilly, along the night-dark sidewalk for a foot or two before he ended the scream with another bullet.

So all of Mr. Oscar Denny's good intentions, his calculated and his instinctual actions, on behalf of his son, came to nothing. Nothing, that is, so far as keeping him from

being a killer went. But the long years of uncondemned interest in the means of death, the carefully and legally accumulated instruments, the possession of a respectable position in the civil structure, an attitude of unhurried calm, all contributed towards making Arthur a much more effective killer than if he had been compelled to hide his tastes and capacities across the years and lurch along in secret ways to find his destiny.

He even got a job. Not a clock-punching job, nor one with some on-the-spot and go-getting outfit. He became a salesman, on commission only, for an old-fashioned and somnolent firm in another city, which represented several European manufacturers of knifeware. Thus legitimized even further (he continued his appearances at hobby shows, his annual exhibition at the museum, joined a hunt club and a lodge and a veterans' post, won prizes at skeet-shooting), he could travel as he liked, and handle—publicly, or semi-publicly—the shining objects of his desire without a shadow of suspicion arising anywhere.

"This is a beautiful piece of work! Look at that handle! See how it fits your grip? Test that blade—go ahead, just test it. *That* won't go dull on you in a few months."

Nor would it. He owned several of its mates and had used them frequently, for the dispatch with

which he had handled the contract for Barand had won approval, and gained him other contracts. He had not made a better mouse-trap, and the world did not beat a path to his door. But the principle was the same.

"How come you used a knife on this last job?"

"It's quieter. There were still a lot of lights on in the house. You put a knife in the diaphragm and nobody is going to hear anything, because the air leaks out and it's impossible to yell for help."

"Okay. They was just wondering."

In times gone by, Her Majesty's hangman would pay a courtesy call upon the condemned man, express the hope that the latter felt no resentment over the former's

performance of his official duties, and assure him that it would be quite painless.

And in earlier days and in another country yet, the headsman would kneel at his victim's feet and ask for, and obtain, his forgiveness before rising to raise the axe. These little gallantries formed no part of Arthur Denny's career. As a rule he had no occasion for conversation with the party of the second part at all.

But there had been one exception.

Either the man had been warned, or his nerves were just—and for just reason—unsteady. Whatever, he had whirled around as Arthur approached, and grabbed him by the wrist—the wrong wrist. The alarmed expression had given way to surprise. Plainly, he was expecting to see another, probably a local, man.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

Arthur was later both amused and gratified by his own reply, so apt was it and such quick thinking did it display. "I'm just an old pro," he said. And struck. The surprise on the man's face was quickly dissolved into a greater one.

TOMMY TUCKER was short, plump, and pink, just exactly as a man named Tommy Tucker should look. Major Jarvis was thin and grizzled and had a wall-eye. None of the other members were in sight when Arthur Denny arrived at the hunting lodge one grim afternoon in early winter.

"Hey, look who's here!" Tommy Tucker exclaimed. "Haven't seen you all season, Arty. How come?"

"Business," Arty said, briefly.

It had been a *long* piece of business, too. Brothers, three of them, with untoward ambitions of setting up their own regional monopoly of beer distributing. The first two had been easy enough, but the third one had run. Far, but not far enough.

"Well, I might just as well have spent the whole season tending to *my* business," Tommy Tucker said. "Didn't get a thing, not a single buck. The major got seven. *Seven!*"

Major Jarvis said, "That's what they're there for. You come to kill deer, Denny, or to hang around the bar like some others I could name."

"Hear!" said Tommy Tucker.

Arthur said he'd come to kill deer. "You have anything in mind, especially?" he asked.

The major had. A fat buck had been sighted near the north ridge.

"Let's go get him, then," Arty said. "Soon as I change. Okay?"

The major said okay. Tommy reached for his glass, hesitated, said, "Mind if I come along. I might be lucky."

The major said, "By all means. He'll probably break for cover, and we'll have a nice walk up the hills. Exercise will do you good."

Decisively, Tommy picked up

his glass. "Well, skip it, then," he said. "Unless you want to wait for the chasers to come back and see if they'll go out again."

But Major Jarvis said, as Arty went to change, that he never had used the services of the chasers, and had done very well without them.

Out in the gray December day, the major referred back to Tommy Tucker. "Fat, soft fool," he called him. "He's doomed. All fat, soft fools are doomed. The cities are doomed, all of them, because they're full of fat, soft people. You know that, don't you, Denny?"

Arthur Denny knew that the major had certain political and philosophical ideas which he seldom spoke of, but could speak of for hours, once started. He didn't want to start him.

"Which end of the north ridge, do you think?" he asked.

Major Jarvis indicated the direction with his hand. Here and there a few brown leaves clung to the trees, and once a rabbit froze in between a pair of silver birches. The deer season would soon be over, but while it lasted no one was interested in rabbits. The air was chill and clear and a distant blur and smudge on the horizon—not usually visible—indicated one of the cities of which Major Jarvis had spoken so contemptuously.

The major now spoke again, as they began to climb slowly towards the north ridge. "What got you started in your present line of work, Denny—mind if I ask?"

"I had a business in town and they tore down the building and I couldn't get a good location," Arthur said.

"I see. As simple as that." Major Jarvis thrust his hands more deeply into his pockets. "There's a bear in that ravine, I'm sure of it. He can keep. I want this buck first . . . My own case is far from simple, you know. But I can sum it up in four words. Rotten politics, no pension. Oh, well, I'm not complaining. My present line of work suits me. Highly specialized, top pay, excitement."

Arty didn't have any idea what the major's present line of work was, and couldn't have cared less. He frowned slightly, and Jarvis fell silent as they reached the ridge. It was he who first saw the deer, and indicated it with a gesture. Arthur raised his shotgun, fired. The animal went down on its haunches, thrashing. He fired again. It kicked, then was still. He took out his knife, and went up close.

"Hey, this isn't a buck—it's a doe with horns!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I saw that at once. Rare, but not terribly rare."

Annoyed, Arthur turned around, sheathing his knife. "It's not doe season and I'll have to report it, damn it—why didn't you say so, if you saw it at once."

"Because I wanted your gun

empty," Major Jarvis said, simply. He went down on his knees heavily and fired both barrels into Arthur Denny, then got up as Arthur fell.

"Hunting accidents happen all the time," he murmured. "Never mind, it will be over in a minute. Nothing personal, you know. Although I did join this rather ratty little club just for such a chance. Goodbye, fellow."

Despite the wet warmth he felt on the fingers with which he clutched his torn body, Arthur was cold. Very cold. The major, outlined against the gray sky, was becoming dim. Trying to reach for his knife (a sharp one, a beauty), knowing he could not make it, Arthur gasped one word, one question.

"Why?"

"It's my line of work," said Major Jarvis, now a blur in the darkness and the cold. "Very highly specialized. I'm a professional killer of professional killers. I'm a real old pro."

THE LETTER by Donald E. Westlake

(*Concluded from page 106*)

river. He appeared to have been beaten, and then shot, and finally hurled into the river with automobile tire chains wrapped around his body. But his clothing had become ensnagged in a boat's anchor and the body had been carried to the surface. The police estimated he'd been dead three or four days.

So I opened the letter, and read it, and I must confess that I was surprised. I voted for you, you know, Governor. But I assure you I would have voted quite differently if I had known about your past.

At any rate, here I am. I promise you I have been more careful with the letter than John Harrow was, and that in the event of my death it *will* go directly to the police. I have learned, you see, from his mistakes.

You wonder why I didn't follow his instructions, why—with my well-earned reputation for honesty and trustworthiness—I did not mail the letter at once, unread, to the Police Commissioner? How, you wonder, do my present actions jibe with my reputation?

Ah, well. You see, I was never offered one hundred thousand dollars before.

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THE EYE WITNESS

by C. B. GILFORD

It's risky to hurl a murder victim from a bridge in broad daylight. But the killer had no way of knowing how sharp a frightened girl's eyes could be.

A Chilling Novelet of Suspense

GERRY SANDS had left the office early, but not quite soon enough to beat the first of the rush hour traffic going north on the bridge. Now she edged her car into the long double line. SPEED LIMIT 40 the signs said, but they weren't doing more than twenty. It was hot in that metal box, even with all the windows rolled down. Her hands perspired on the steering wheel. She felt sticky all over. She had a headache besides, and she would have liked to go wading out into the sun-dappled river and feel the cool water flowing over her body . . .

She was so engrossed in her own trivial problems that she didn't actually see where the man came from. She was vaguely aware, as her car approached the spot up ahead, that repairs were being made on the outside south lane of the bridge. There were three or four trucks and maybe a dozen

men in work clothes. She pitied their having to work in the hot sun.

But there was this other man. Perhaps she imagined he was one of the crew because he wore work clothes too, and a tropical sun helmet, and he seemed to have come from their direction, walking on the narrow strip of raised concrete allowed for pedestrians crossing the bridge.

The man was carrying something that looked like a sack. A gunny sack or maybe even paper.

But a sack, because it bent as it sagged over his shoulder. A long, large sack, and obviously heavy. Maybe full of cement, or sand, some material used in repairing the bridge roadway. What was there about the sack?

Almost opposite Gerry Sands, the man did an odd thing. He halted for just the briefest moment, rested his burden on the bridge rail—it certainly looked as if he were resting—but then, either the sack fell, or the man pushed it over the railing.

He walked on then, not pausing even to watch the sack plummet toward the river a hundred feet below. Gerry Sands screamed.

The words she screamed were not even thought out. They came automatically, instinctively. "Stop that man!"

It took a second or two for her to realize that with the roar of traffic and the jackhammers of the repair crew, nobody could have heard her scream. By the time she floored the brake pedal, the man was well past her.

The screech of other brakes from behind her was interrupted by the grinding crunch of metal, and the impact of the rear-end collision threw her backward against the seat. More brakes made the same shrill protest, and several other blows jarred her. But she was oblivious of herself or the accident caused by her quick stop. She wrenched the car door open and jumped out. The man was still walking away, fast, but not in any panicked haste.

"Stop him!" she shouted, waving and pointing to the man.

She hadn't succeeded with him, but she'd halted both lanes of northbound traffic. There were few vehicles in the southbound lanes, but even those were slowing, hesitating, curious about the accident. The noise of the jackhammers had ceased, but a few horns were beginning to sound their impatience.

"That man!" she yelled again.

But nobody seemed to understand. Drivers poked their heads from car windows. Those directly involved in the accident were climbing out to assess the damage. No one seemed concerned about what Gerry Sands was concerned about. She had no choice. She ran after the man.

He was already fifty yards away, probably more, and his pace seemed to have quickened. And now he had a funny, waddling walk. She ran after him. People gawked at her. Some shouted. She lost one spike heel, stopped and kicked off the other.

"Wait!" she yelled at him.

He must have heard her, even over the increasing bedlam. He stopped abruptly, half turned, and glanced back at her over his shoulder. She stopped too.

For a flickering moment their eyes met. And they understood each other. *I knew what that was*

you threw over the railing, she accused him. *All right,* he answered her silently, *what business is it of yours?*

He turned and walked away. She hesitated, angry, confused, and frightened. Then she pursued him again, but more slowly, and shouting again, "Stop him—stop him!"

A man climbed out of one of the stalled cars, but instead of heading after the fugitive, he intercepted Gerry Sands. He reached for her, and she almost fell into his arms.

"Stop him—*stop him!*"

"Who?"

"Him—him—"

"Take it easy, lady. What's the matter? You hurt?"

She shook her head angrily.

"Where you in that accident up ahead?"

"No—no—I'm all right. Let go of me. Go after him!"

He was a nice man, a kindly looking middle-aged man, but he didn't understand. He wasn't even listening to her.

"Let go of me, please."

"Lady, you're hurt—you're hysterical. Let me put you in my car."

She wrenched away finally from the would-be Samaritan, and ran after the man. But she saw that he was gone. She ran anyway, all the way to the end of the bridge. Still no sign of him.

She looked around wildly. Where had he gone? Jumped? No, no, that was ridiculous. A little beyond the end of the bridge was another repair crew, men in tan work clothes. Had he joined them? Or belonged to them originally? Had he gotten into a car and driven south? She could see several moving down the road. Or had he merely stepped into one of the long lines of stalled northbound cars? Was he sitting there now, watching her in amusement and triumph?

"Hey, what's going on here?"

People were gathering around her now, dozens of them, from the idle cars, from everywhere. One of them was a policeman. He thrust through the group, confronting her.

"I was chasing that man, but he got away," she told him.

They stared at her blankly, thinking that she was injured, in shock, or crazy.

"But he did," she kept insisting. "I saw him—a sack. I know there was a body in it."

MEL CORSING had sat around Police Headquarters all day, and he had phoned three stories to his editor at the *Post,* the final tabulation of the loss in yesterday's Savings and Loan robbery, a new lead in last week's slaying of the playboy oil company executive, and the promotion of Sergeant George Hershel to the rank of Lieutenant. Other police and crime news had come off the street, of course, but those weren't Mel Corsing's beat.

He heard, as it came into Headquarters, the report of the multi-car accident and tie-up on the Airport Bridge. Several minor injuries to drivers and passengers, but mostly just dented fenders and grilles, and lots of short tempers. Lucky thing—good visibility and dry pavement—or it could have been worse. A young woman, Gerry Sands, seemed to have been the cause. The why of it, mechanical trouble or driver fault, not immediately known. It was a slow day, and they had little else to talk about.

Forty-five minutes after the initial report, two brawny cops brought in a girl who turned out to be Gerry Sands. Mel Corsing hovered on the edges of the thing, listening to the cops, alert for his story. Gerry Sands was a pretty blue-eyed brunette, but rather the worse for wear. Her hair was all windblown, her lipstick a mess, and she'd been crying. Mel phoned for a photographer.

It was George Hershel, the new Lieutenant, tall and saturnine, who finally came along and made off with the girl and one of the cops, took them into his private office. Mel waited, long accustomed to patience.

"Interesting," he said to Sergeant Russo. "Guy had a lot of nerve throwing a body in the river in broad daylight."

"Who says it was a body?" Russo growled.

"The girl is convinced it was."

"She's crazy."

"Excited maybe, but I don't think she's crazy."

Russo smiled condescendingly. "Okay, just mistaken."

"Who says she's mistaken?"

"I do," Russo answered.

Mel waited. His photographer arrived and waited too.

It was half an hour at least before Hershel came out of his office with the girl. He was wearing his usual noncommittal look, but the girl seemed a lot calmer than before.

Mel bored in, and while his photographer was getting a shot he cornered Hershel. "Are you booking her, Lieutenant?"

"What for?" Hershel looked bored. Even being addressed by his new title hadn't impressed him.

"Careless driving. Eleven-car pile-up."

"Your usual exaggeration, Corsing. About five cars."

"Still careless driving, wouldn't you say, Lieutenant?"

"I wouldn't say."

"Are you booking her?"

"Why should I?"

"How about protective custody? She saw a murderer disposing of a corpse."

"Go away, Corsing. You annoy me."

"What's going to happen to the girl?"

"She's going home. Have a good rest. I'll talk to her again tomor-

row morning. That is, if it's all right with you, Mr. Corsing."

"Can I talk to her?"

"No."

Gerry Sands was taken away under escort, and Lieutenant Hershel went back to his office.

Mel Corsing lingered and mingled. "What do you think the girl actually saw?"

"Maybe she saw a guy throwing a big sack of something over the rail, but who says there was a body in the sack?"

"You can tell a body in a gunny sack. You can see, you know, the shape of it."

"She didn't say she saw the shape of it."

"And she didn't say it was a gunny sack."

"Look, she was putting on lipstick, or something like that, and she caused an accident, so she made up this excuse."

Mel Corsing was careful about the story he phoned in. What could he say? That he believed Gerry Sands' story? He didn't—quite. But it was interesting.

ALL THE PAPERS ran it next morning on their front pages. Freak Airport Bridge Accident. Young Woman Driver Saw Man Throw Sack into River. Was Sure Sack Contained a Dead Body. Gerry Sands, twenty-three-year-old brunette secretary . . .

Mel Corsing had slept on the story, and awakened early with a

feeling of curiosity, uneasiness. He arrived at Headquarters by nine o'clock, but Gerry Sands was already ahead of him, and in the Lieutenant's office. It was an hour before he manager to see her, and that was while the Lieutenant was escorting her outside, seeing to it that she would be driven home.

"Miss Sands," Mel started right off, "my paper would like to get the story on what you saw on the Airport Bridge yesterday."

"Miss Sands," Hershel said, "this is Mel Corsing. Watch what you say to him. He's known for exaggeration and distortion."

"How about it, Miss Sands?"

"She saw a man throw a sack over the railing," Hershel an-

swered for her. "But after thorough questioning, she decided it was much too small a sack to contain a body. So you don't have to worry, Corsing. This business has been checked out completely."

"Glad to know the police are on the job," Corsing said as he walked along beside them to the car. "By the way, what *was* in the sack, Lieutenant?"

"How do I know?"

"Don't you care?"

"No."

"How about violation of the anti-litter laws?"

"Not my department."

"Lieutenant, doesn't it seem odd to you that a man would walk across that bridge in daylight, during the rush hour, to throw a sack into the river?"

"Some kind of a nut. The world's full of 'em, Corsing."

"But not a homicidal nut?"

They'd arrived at the car. Hershel turned and confronted his questioner, his thin face expressionless. "The sack was too small for a body," he said.

"Even for a body that was dismembered and re-arranged?"

The Lieutenant smiled suddenly, genuinely amused. "You have an imagination, Corsing. You don't belong on a newspaper. You ought to be writing fiction."

"How about it, Miss Sands?" Corsing tried once more. "How about that sack?"

Outwardly the girl was calm, but maybe there was a nervousness underneath. She seemed to hesitate before she answered. "The Lieutenant has convinced me that the sack was too small to conatin a body."

MEL CORSING had lots of spare time around Headquarters to sit, to think, and to engage in little projects. Sergeant Russo was minimally co-operative. After all, Mel was a friend, not an enemy, of the Police Department.

"Just want to check your current file of Missing Persons," Corsing explained.

"Still thinking about that guy on the bridge, huh?" Russo wasn't stupid.

"I might be."

"Going to find out who was in the sack?"

"If I'm lucky, Sergeant. I'd have to be real lucky, wouldn't I?"

Russo didn't give him access to the files, but he made out a list, names and particulars. Some of the missing people Corsing could discount right away. The men, first of all. Toting a man's body in a sack, a body weighing a hundred and fifty or sixty pounds or more, wouldn't be the easiest thing.

Corsing scanned the list of women especially. There was a Mrs. Zelman, for instance, who'd left her husband last week after twenty years of marriage. But Mrs. Zelman has weighed two hundred pounds, so it was unlikely that Mr.

Zelman had carried her across a bridge. Then there was a Mrs. Fairchild. Sergeant Russo had a large, clear photograph of her. Mrs. Fairchild was too ugly to have been murdered, Corsing decided. But there were several good candidates, and Corsing jotted down all the particulars.

There was one especially. One candidate who looked just right. Corsing felt little trickles of excitement start to run through him as he read about her.

Donna Patton. Aged nineteen. Green eyes. Blonde hair. Weight a hundred and five pounds. No parents, no close relatives at all, so she couldn't have left suddenly to visit her sister in Dubuque. Donna Patton, employed as a waitress in a middle-class restaurant, had just stopped coming to work. Donna Patton, living in a crummy rooming house, was paid up on her rent, had apparently taken little or no luggage, had just disappeared. Three days ago.

Donna Patton. Even the name sounded right.

"Sergeant," Mel wanted to know, "who did you question on this case?"

Russo consulted the file. "Employer and landlady," he answered. "Who else?"

"No suspects?"

"Suspects of what?"

Mel shrugged. "Foul play."

Russo shook his head. "Look, Corsing, you know the police don't start investigating a crime till there's some little bit of evidence that there's been a crime."

"She's missing, Sergeant."

"So she bought a bus ticket."

"What about luggage?" Mel inquired.

"Landlady couldn't be sure. She probably took some stuff. So she didn't like a lot of her old clothes."

"What about boy friends?"

"Landlady said she had several. Maybe she went away with one of them."

Mel Corsing thanked Sergeant Russo, left Headquarters, and drove straight to the place where Donna Patton had lived. It was an old frame-and-stone one-family residence, cut up now like its neighbors into a rooming house.

Mrs. Wallace, slatternly and suspicious, was in charge. "Why do you want to know about her? You some relative?"

"No, just a reporter. Every once in a while we check the Missing Persons in hopes there's a story somewhere."

"Oh, there'd be lots of stories about her" Mrs. Wallace looked grim and disapproving. "Only I don't know any of 'em."

"Donna Patton didn't talk much, eh?"

"Never saw her much. She was in and out. Didn't spend much time here."

"How did she spend her time?"

"Men."

Mel tried to state it carefully.

"She liked entertainment, was that it?"

Mrs. Wallace frowned.

"No sir, this girl was looking for a husband. Desperate to get married. I know that much about her. Came in here from some small town, wanted the kind of job where she could meet men. Can you imagine a girl being so anxious? I had two husbands. I can do without."

"Did Donna Patton meet any men?"

"Oh sure. Prospects too. She didn't waste her time on the bums."

Mel was patient. Mrs. Wallace had been alert at her doorway, in her windows, had eavesdropped on phone conversations, and she knew the names of three of the 'prospects.' Mel jotted them down. Lee Frizell, Arthur Rich, Raymond Bentz. No exact addresses, but good leads.

"Do you think Donna Patton eloped with one of these fellows?" He took out cigarettes, offered Mrs. Wallace one, and she accepted it.

"Who knows?" Mrs. Wallace smoked with concentrated pleasure. "Either that, or—"

"Or what?"

"Maybe she gave up on all of them. Maybe she gave up on the whole business and went back home."

"Where was her home?"

Mrs. Wallace shook her head. "Don't know."

"Why should she leave her clothes behind?"

"How'd you know she did that?"

"Police records. By the way, Mrs. Wallace, why did you report Donna Patton's disappearance to the police?"

Mrs. Wallace crushed out her cigarette. "Those men of hers. I didn't like none of 'em. If any of 'em did anything to her, I wanted the police to know about it."

"The police don't seem too interested," Mel said.

"What do they know?"

"Do you think Donna Patton may have met with violence, Mrs. Wallace?"

"I don't trust men, Mr. Corsing. The poor girl wanted to get married. Maybe she tried to take a short cut. That puts a man in a corner. He's a cornered rat, and he fights like one. You know what I mean?"

"I think I do, Mrs. Wallace. Now if you could only tell me all you know about these three men."

MEL CORSING could arrange his spare time and he used it for several days to get a line on his three suspects. Only then, when he was well armed with preliminary, basic information, did he bother to approach Gerry Sands

By that time the story of the man on the bridge had disappeared from the newspapers. Nothing had come of it. A freak

accident. It was in the hands of insurance adjustors now.

Gerry Sands lived in one of those new garden apartments that were proliferating in the northern residential suburbs. She lived alone, as he found out later. At first she'd shared the modest one-bedroom unit with another girl, but the other girl had left town. Gerry Sands couldn't quite afford the rent, but she'd stayed on.

When he telephoned her, she refused to see him, assuring him that the whole thing was her imagination and she wanted nothing now except to forget all about it. But when he knocked on her door later that same evening, she must have been remembering again, because she let him in.

He was purposely casual about it. When she offered him a cup of coffee, he accepted it, sat in an easy chair, and sipped the coffee patiently.

"Have you talked to Lieutenant Hershel lately?" he asked.

"Two or three days ago. He stopped by to tell me that there'd been no reports of anything floating in the river."

"Of course the sack would have been weighted to make it sink," Mel said.

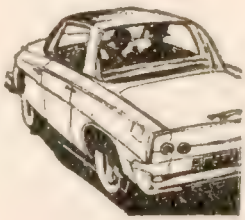
Gerry Sands nodded. Despite the furrows of concentration marking her brow, she was pretty, Mel decided. And he wondered just momentarily how much that had to do with his interest in the case. She had dark hair, eyes to match, and flawless pale skin for contrast. A thoughtful, introverted girl, a girl with whom one might even have an intelligent conversation.

"Mr. Corsing," she asked suddenly, "what do you get out of all this?"

"A story."

"Is that all? You're not burning to see justice done?"

"If the guy who dropped the



sack over the rail was a murderer, I'd like to see him caught."

She looked straight into his eyse for a long moment. "So would I," she said finally. "It was so strange that day on the bridge. I *knew* it somehow. I knew there was something horrible in that sack. And so that made the man—he had to be —a killer." She stopped, turned away, embarrassed. "It must sound silly," she finished.

"To Lieutenant Hershel maybe. Not to me."

"Why should you believe me?"

"Why should you believe there was a body in that sack?"

She searched for a word. "A hunch maybe."

"A hunch, yes. That's exactly

what I have, Miss Sands. A long shot. Way out somewhere. It itches me. I'd like to give it a try anyway. And I need your help."

She sat down very quietly. "Of course I'll help."

He told her about his search through Missing Persons, about Donna Patton, and about the three men who had courted her. It was all, he admitted, pure conjecture.

Gerry Sands listened solemnly, then afterwards asked him, "What can I do to help?" She already knew, of course.

"We have three supposed suspects," Mel told her. "I want you to take a look at them. Maybe one was the man on the bridge."

"All right," she said.

"Would you know the guy if you saw him again?"

"We looked straight at each other," she answered. "I think I'd know him anywhere."

Next morning Mel Corsing and Gerry Sands were there when the food service department of the super-drug store opened. They sat in the farthest booth at the rear, from which they could see the entrance, the counter stools, and all the other booths.

"Yesterday I followed Frizell," Mel said, "and he came in here for breakfast. Maybe he'll be back today."

Mel and the girl waited, sipping coffee.

"Look," Mel went on, "it'd be better if I didn't point out Frizell to you. You just tell me if you see him. That way you won't be prejudiced."

She nodded, pale and nervous. He watched her face as well as the door. A nice girl. Solid, not the hysterical kind. She had really seen a man. But how sure had her intuition been? How sure was his own?

"You still can't describe the guy?" He had asked her the question a dozen times, and now it came out again.

She shook her head. "There was something—I don't know—something about him. I don't know what color his eyes were. I couldn't give the police that kind of information. But I'd know him if I saw him. I'm sure of that."

That was the moment Lee Frizell came through the door. He was a heavy man, heavy without being fat or large. His face was square, his nose thick, slightly crooked. He might have been a prizefighter. But he was only a driver-salesman for the Wright Baking Company, as the lettering on his jacket testified.

Mel hadn't told his witness about Frizell's uniform. He watched her face now. No flicker of recognition crossed it. Frizell went to one of the counter stools, sat looking at a menu, his profile to them. Mel waited, hoping.

"That's Frizell," he told her finally.

"Oh no!"

"Take a good long look. Everything. Face, build, size, shape."

She tried very hard, but gave up. "I don't think so," she admitted. "No, I'm sure it isn't. I'm sorry."

"Okay, okay," he soothed her, "but let's be sure. I don't mean I doubt you, but let's see if Mr. Frizell recognizes you."

He pushed his empty coffee cup over the edge of the table. It fell with a crash on the floor. Everybody in the place glanced around to see what had caused the noise. Frizell among them.

He couldn't have helped seeing Gerry Sands. Mel stood up to call attention to himself. Frizell looked at him certainly. He would have had to have seen his girl companion too. But there was no reaction. His face was blank.

"He can't be the man," Gerry said when Mel sat down again.

"Don't be too sure," he argued back. "If a guy has the nerve to commit murder, and then to dump the body off a busy bridge in broad daylight, he must know how to keep a poker face."

They shadowed him, hoping they might have startled him into some suspicious action. When he'd finished his breakfast, they followed him out of the drug store, and tailed him in Mel's car. All Frizell did, however, was to go straight to his job, like any honest man.

"Do we cross him off?" Gerry asked.

"No," Mel insisted. "Not yet."

ARTHUR RICH was an accountant. They waited down in the lobby of the office building where he worked, and saw him come out of the elevator on his way to lunch. He was middle-sized, wore a neat dark suit, even in this warm weather. A suit and a straw hat with a small green feather in the band. Beneath the brim his face was undistinguished and pale.

Arthur Rich wasn't an outdoor man. They followed him out onto the street.

"How does he look to you?" Mel asked.

"He's smaller than Fritzell."

"Which one is the right size?"

"I'm not sure," Gerry Sands said.

They went into the same little restaurant with him, sat two tables away, and watched him all during lunch. Arthur Rich paid no attention to anyone around him. He was engrossed in his own thoughts. He ate mechanically, and very little.

"He looks worried," Gerry said.

"Doesn't mean too much," Mel decided. "Maybe he's just wondering where Donna Patton went to, like we are. What do you think? Could he be our man?"

"I don't think so."

"He's not the man?"

Gerry shook her head, angry with herself. Or was she beginning to doubt herself?

Mel used the same routine as before. He made a loud noise. Ar-

thur Rich glanced in their direction, stared blankly at both of them. He was either completely innocent or a good actor.

And after his lunch he returned to his office.

Raymond Bentz was the easiest of the three to find and observe. He was the proprietor of Raymond's, a small men's apparel shop four blocks from the restaurant where Donna Patton had worked.

He was there to greet them when Mel and Gerry Sands walked into the shop as customers. He showed Mel his collection of dress shirts, out of which Mel bought two. He smiled at Gerry, spoke to her several times, seemed to be aware of her good looks and the fact there were no rings on her left hand.

Raymond Bentz would have been, to some girls at least, an attractive man. He was about thirty-five, of medium height, probably had been athletic but was now just a bit inclined to fleshiness. His dark hair was wavy, his pleasantly featured face tanned. A man who prided himself on his appearance, his obvious though not sensational appeal to women. When he smiled at Gerry, it was with confidence.

But he gave no sign of recognizing her. Mel paid for his two shirts, and as soon as they were out of the store he stopped Gerry and confronted her.

"Well?"

"He's not the man either."

"But he's the third!"

"I know. The third and last."

He nodded grimly.

"Mel, I'm sorry. I was sure I knew. But I guess I was wrong. It just has to be one of these three. It's my fault."

"Forget it," Mel said. What we both need is a drink."

THEY HAD A drink, and then another, and Gerry brightened a little. "Well, you have two nice shirts," she said.

"So the day hasn't been wasted," Mel agreed.

"Maybe you'd better try somebody else on your Missing Persons list."

He shook his head stubbornly. "No, Donna Patton's the one. I'm more convinced than ever."

"You're kidding." She smiled wearily.

"No, I'm not kidding. And I haven't had too much to drink either. But my feeling about this thing gets stronger all the time. Donna Patton was just the kind of girl who gets murdered."

"What kind of girl is that? Am I the kind?"

"Not quite," he said.

"I don't know whether I should be flattered or not."

"You're a lot prettier than Donna Patton. That's not the point."

"What is the point then?" she asked.

"It's what Mrs. Wallace said. Donna wanted to get married."

"Is that the same thing as asking to be murdered?"

"In certain cases, yes." He signalled to the waitress for another pair of drinks. But his certainty wasn't from the alcohol. What was it a good reporter was supposed to have? An instinct for a story? That instinct was his goad.

"Don't you think so, Gerry?" he went on. "A girl wants to marry a guy, and he isn't so eager. Can't she make it tough on him? Not even counting the complications there'd be if the guy was married—which none of our suspects is. Couldn't she put the pressure on him, till the only escape would be murder? Maybe not premeditated murder. But she might get a guy so mad that he'd just want to choke her—and he would choke her. Then she'd be stone cold dead."

The waitress brought the drinks.

"There's another angle," Mel mused afterwards. "Donna Patton had not one man she was after, but three. What does that suggest to you?"

Gerry shrugged. "Jealousy?"

"Exactly. As I said, Donna wasn't as pretty as you, but she was attractive enough. Murder's been done, *for* and *to,* women who were infinitely plainer looking."

"Mel—"

"Yes?"

"You make it sound very convincing. I *knew* there was a body in that sack. But why did he dispose of the body in that way?"

"The guy has a flair. I believe it. Look. He killed her without premeditation, in a fit of either rage or jealousy. So suddenly he has a body on his hands. Donna was missing for a couple of days. Lord knows what he did with the body while he was deciding how to dispose of it. But he knows that the best way to avoid a murder rap is to get rid of the body permanently.

"Or if the body is ever discovered, to arrange it so there's no connection between this unidentified body and a missing girl. Now you'll admit he's pretty far on his way to accomplishing this much."

Gerry nodded. "Okay—the river—the weighted sack. But why in daylight, during the rush hour?"

Mel felt the certainty inside him strong and burning. "Number One," he said, "because it's incredible, impossible. Isn't that

what prevented Lieutenant Hershel from even imagining it could be? Other people on the bridge saw the man too, at least out of the corner of their eyes. But they didn't imagine such a thing either. And no doubt our lad had a reasonable story to tell in case he was seen by a cop. No, it took you and your imagination, Gerry my girl."

He stopped sipping, and looked at her. She was beautiful. Why didn't he just forget all this nonsense?

"Number Two," he found himself saying. "It was the easiest way. Do you know how hard it is to get to a river these days, and not be seen, not be thought suspicious? Some lonely bridge maybe. But if you throw something off a lonely bridge, and are seen even from a distance, there's suspicion. On foot, or in a boat, a car—mud, sand, weeds—you've got to get the body out where it's deep enough. Uh uh, what our boy did was absolutely the smartest thing he could have done. He had the sack in the trunk of his car—all ready to go, especially if he knew there was that repair work being done on the bridge to add a little confusion."

He stopped, looked at her, found her smiling quizzically.

"Sounds almost too pat, doesn't it?" he went on. "It fits because I want it to fit. I'm saying Donna Patton just had to be murdered because she wanted to get married. Ridiculous? But what other reason would any of them have to kill her? And I still think Donna Patton was murdered."

"So do I. Isn't there any other way besides depending on me for identification?"

There was, he knew suddenly. "Find a way to make our murderer identify himself."

THEY HAD TO do it themselves, as Mel knew they would. But to make completely sure, he checked it with his editor. He had a dozen ideas for tricky news stories designed to trap a murderer, but the editor would have none of them without police approval, and he wasn't about to start a feud with the Police Department over a murdered girl whom no one could prove was murdered.

Police co-operation or police approval were likewise impossible. Mel didn't blame Lieutenant Hershel. The Lieutenant was all for catching murderers, but he himself wasn't going to be caught looking silly. Dragging the river was an expensive operation. And he wouldn't sanction a story that pretended the river was going to be dragged. Nor would he approve a story that said the police were closing in, or that Gerry Sands had made a tentative identification, or anything—anything at all.

So they had to do it themselves.

"I wish there were some other way," Mel told her.

"But there isn't. We decided that."

"It puts you in danger." He had a moment of great regret and reluctance. "If Donna Patton was murdered, she probably asked for it. Why should a girl like you risk your life?"

She reached over and put her hand on his. "*If* Donna Patton was murdered! Mel, *we* know she was, even if nobody else does. So it's up to us to catch the murderer. No one else can do it."

He got up and paced. Gerry's apartment was very cute, feminine, and he had liked its atmosphere, so different from his world. But today the place accused him. He was taking Gerry out of this safe little environment and offering her as bait in a trap set for a murderer.

"Shall I get on the phone?" she asked, interrupting his gloomy thoughts.

He stared at her for a long time. She was frightened, as she had a perfect right to be. But she was brave also, braver than he. She was willing to accept the danger. Well, it was up to him to minimize it.

"All right," he said.

"Who first?" Gerry asked, her voice slightly tremulous.

"Bentz and Rich. We can get them where they work. That might give 'em a jolt, to find out we know that much about them."

She dialed one of the numbers. It rang four times, then a man's voice answered, cheery, slightly unctuous. "Raymond's."

"Mr. Bentz?" She glanced at her rehearsed notes.

"Yes."

"This is Gerry Sands."

"Who?"

"You surely must remember my name from the newspapers."

"I'm afraid I don't know you, Miss Sands."

"Oh, but you do know me, Mr. Bentz. We met a few days ago on a bridge."

Was she mistaken? Imagining it? Or was there a sort of hiss, a sharp intake of breath? Was there just the slightest hesitation, a beat, before Raymond Bentz answered?

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do. Now listen carefully, Mr. Bentz. This is for your own good. I'd just as soon keep the police out of this if you would. Maybe we can arrange it. If you're interested, meet me tonight. Say about eleven o'clock. The bridge usually is not too busy then. In exactly the same place. You know which place I'm talking about. You can drive by first and check if I'm alone. I'll wear dark clothes so I won't be too easy to see. But since you'll know *exactly* where to look, you can find me. Got it, Mr. Bentz?"

Another pause on the wire, and then Bentz's voice came back gay and debonair. "It sounds fascinating, my dear. If I just knew what you were talking about."

She hung up on him, softly.

"Raymond Bentz is a slick article," she told Mel.

"He's my candidate," Mel said. He was having doubts again. "This is a job for a police stake-out. But Hershel would never do it for us. And if he knew we were trying this, he'd find some way to interfere and spoil it."

Gerry was already dialing the office where Arthur Rich worked. A secretary answered, and a moment later the man himself.

"This is Arthur Rich." It was a dry, thin voice that seemed to fit its owner and his profession.

She gave Rich the same routine as she'd given Bentz. Only Rich didn't interrupt. He heard her through to the end, and then he asked, "Is that all lady?"

"That's all," she said, and hung up.

Her eyes were wider and the blue of them was darker as she started at Mel.

"Arthur Rich is the one," she said. "His surprise and his guilt just oozed through the phone."

"I hope you're wrong. Rich would be the hardest one to flush out. He'd be the most likely to sit tight and wait and see whether we're guessing or whether we really know something."

"Don't you think he'll show up at the bridge?"

"He won't even drive by to see if you're there."

They waited an hour to let Lee Frizell arrive home. He lived with his widowed mother, supported her. A good, hard-working young man. He should have wanted a home. Why hadn't he succeeded with Donna Patton right away instead of maybe killing her?

"Could I speak to Mr. Frizell please?"

A female voice had answered, the mother probably. Lee Frizell, when he came to the phone, slurred his words. "Gerry who?"

"Gerry Sands. We met a few days ago on the bridge."

There were several seconds of silence, and then Frizell asked, "What did you say?" And throughout Gerry's routine, he kept asking questions like that. He was asking a question at the end when she hung up.

"He can't be the one," Gerry said afterwards.

"Maybe not," Mel conceded. "But he got the message."

They had plenty of time. They drank coffee there in Gerry's apartment, played records to which neither of them listened. Gerry was nervous and frightened, but did her best not to show it. Mel silently reviewed the wisdom of what they were trying to accomplish, and wondered. The time passed slowly.

They had dinner at their favorite steak house, but neither of them was hungry. Later they drove around, back and forth across the Airport Bridge a dozen times.

"What's the matter?" she asked him.

"I'm worried about what could happen to you, not even counting our special friend."

She laughed, a bit shakily. "Didn't we go over all that? I have that little niche between the girders to hide in. And I'm wearing these dark clothes. Nobody will see me unless they're deliberately looking for me."

"If a cop spots you, we're finished."

"All right, but we have to take that chance."

They had to take other chances too, of course. They knew that the man they were hunting would be as careful as they. He might have the bridge under surveillance the whole evening, long before his scheduled time of arrival. He might be watching them as they made their approach. He might see Mel Corsing, and know that Gerry Sands wasn't working alone.

They had, by necessity, a single accomplice. Willie Maxton, an old friend of Mel's, reliable, content to be of service and not ask questions. Willie's cab pulled up at the curb in front of the restaurant at precisely ten to ten. Mel left Gerry at the table there and was waiting outside for the cab.

"Willie, you know the spot on the bridge."

"Sure." Willie Maxton never wasted words.

"Try to pick a time to cross when there are no other cars on the bridge. If you can, that is. If not, you know the game. You pretend the motor's konked out, we both get out, and you cover for me while I—"

"Sure—sure, Mel."

They were lucky at the bridge. Willie bided his time, then made a dash across. In the center of the span he braked fast, and Mel hopped out. In seconds he was over the rail and the cab was gone.

This was the part of the plan that had been impossible to rehearse or be at all sure of. All Mel knew was that at this spot there was a jutting out of the steel work, a kind of small platform three or four feet below road level.

When he climbed over the rail, he hung onto the lowest bar with his hands while his feet searched for something solid below. He found it, then explored for the

edges of it, trying not to think of the yawning emptiness beneath him and the river far below.

But the whole thing was easier than he'd thought. Once he had the nerve to let go with his hands, he discovered that he had a small hiding place tucked under the sidewalk of the bridge, not large enough to lie down on, but sufficient size to enable him to remain concealed while standing. By crouching down and in under the shadows, he was surely invisible to either motorists or pedestrians above.

He waited, shifting a bit now and then to avoid stiffness or cramps. Cars whirred by with decreasing frequency. Time went slowly. But the wait was necessary. The coast had to be clear.

Finally, after ages, he heard a car braking and slowing. He dared not try to look up and see who it was. It might be Willie's cab with Gerry in it, or it could be—the man. A car door slammed, but he couldn't tell if there were footsteps afterwards because the car made a lot of noise when it gunned away.

So he continued to wait. Gerry was up there. Or somebody else. If it was Gerry, and Willie had been on schedule, then the time was now five to eleven.

Thoughts raced through his brain, thoughts of the holes in his plan. Of the risks Gerry was taking. He had wanted her to carry a gun in her purse, and she had preferred the little tear gas 'fountain pen.' He should have insisted.

And now that his mind was on this track, a terrifying possibility occurred to him. Why couldn't the murderer of Donna Patton drive across the bridge, stop opposite Gerry, shoot her at that close range, and hope by a second murder to eliminate the dangerous witness to the first?

Mel wanted to climb up there to protect her, or at least to shout a warning. But he controlled himself. Maybe it wasn't as simple for the murderer as he'd imagined. Trying to consolidate a murder that was still secret with another murder that was out in the open would just be tripling his chances of getting caught.

But what if they'd frightened their man to point where he wasn't thinking straight? No, no—this was the man who'd had enough nerve to dispose of a corpse in broad daylight.

Mel waited. Cars went by, but none stopped. In between the car noises, it would have been possible to hear footsteps. But he heard none.

Time dragged. Surely it had been longer than the five minutes. Gerry then had arrived in the first car. She wouldn't have been late. Gerry was up there, waiting like himself. But the murderer was late —or wasn't coming.

Mel knew that a considerable period of time had passed, knew

that the rendezvous had failed, when he moved from his precarious position and climbed back up onto the bridge. Gerry was standing there, almost tucked inside a girder.

"He's not coming," he told her. He looked at his watch. "Twenty minutes to twelve."

"I'm afraid you're right," she agreed. "Not a single car even slowed down."

He took her arm and they walked to the end of the bridge. Willie Maxton was waiting there, and took them aboard.

"Any luck?" he asked.

"None."

Willie took them straight to Gerry's apartment. Mel sat dejectedly on the sofa, stretching his stiffened legs. Gerry made coffee brought two cups, and sat beside him.

"What now?" she asked. "Do you give up?"

"Nope."

"What are you going to do?"

"I guess I'll just quit my job and spend all my time keeping tabs on our friends. See if somebody starts acting funny. Or something equally as drastic." He smoked for a moment. "Or maybe just turn all our brilliant deductions over to Lieutenant Hershel. That would put an end to it for good."

"Why don't you think about it again tomorrow?"

Before he left, however, he kissed her. Several times, in fact.

And he told her how he'd worried about her, and he would definitley never put her in that position again.

Then he kissed her some more, told her good night, and went home.

WHEN MEL LEFT, Gerry leaned for a moment against the shut and chained door. She felt infinitely weary, but those three cups of coffee would probably keep her awake. Their project's utter failure was overwhelming. And there was Mel Corsing. They'd shared a common cause, experienced a common defeat. Now he had kissed her. She had liked being kissed.

She went into the bedroom, trying to measure just how much she had liked it. A cool breeze fluttered the window curtains. It would be a good night to sleep. Perhaps in the morning she could think more clearly about Mel.

She had just pulled the zipper of her dress when she saw the movement in the mirror. The closet door—opening. She had barely time to turn to meet the unexpected onslaught before the man was upon her.

But she saw his face as he came, and she knew it was the face of the man on the bridge. The eyes. She'd said she'd know him anywhere, and she knew him now. The eyes spoke to her. *All right,* they said, *you made it your business, and now you're going to be sorry.*

For a strange, exultant second, however, she could feel only triumph. Their hunch had been right! They'd found him—and flushed him!

Then his hands, enormously strong, were on her throat. He spoke, but his voice was so thick with the passion of murder that she couldn't identify it.

"We'll have a date on the bridge tonight," he said, "and you'll go over this time."

She fought as best she could. She kicked and gouged and clawed. But her assailant was infinitely stronger than she. Irrelevant thoughts clogged her brain, perhaps to keep her from thinking the awful thought that she herself was going to die. Donna Patton had died this way, with these same cruel hands choking off her breath. And then Donna Patton had been stuffed into a bag, as she, Gerry Sands would be, shortly—shortly—

She struck out with her fists, hammering empty air. Now she was being forced backward, onto the bed. At least, she thought, if she turned up missing too, Lieutenant Hershel would have to listen to Mel. And if she could mark her attacker, draw blood, that would be evidence. She tried to drive her nails deeper into his wrists.

But the hands maintained their horrible pressure around her throat, and she could no longer breathe. Her energy ebbed. The room blurred.

So she saw and knew what happened only vaguely, distantly. Mel—it could only be Mel—behind

the man, dragging him off. Fighting, rolling on the floor. His fists—while she lay there on the bed and couldn't move. Finally a hand, Mel's hand, grabbing her bedside lamp, and bringing it down hard.

She was in his arms then, crying and clinging to him. "I put the chain on the door—"

"It didn't last when I heard your scream."

"I screamed?"

"You managed a yelp."

"Why did you come back?" Gerry asked.

"I'd forgotten something. To tell you I love you."

She stayed there in his arms for a moment, grateful. "Is he dead?" she asked finally.

"I don't think so."

"Which one is it?"

He grinned suddenly. "I haven't looked."

"Well, don't you want to know?"

They went together to make the identification. The man lay in a shapeless huddle on the floor. Tan shirt and trousers as he'd worn the first time on the bridge, and on his head a kind of multi-colored stocking cap.

"He doesn't look like any of the three," Mel gasped.

"But he's the man I saw." Gerry knelt and ripped off the strange cap. There were tight, iron-gray curls underneath. "It's a woman!"

They stared blankly at each other for a moment. Then Mel nodded and smiled.

"You couldn't identify the man, Gerry, and you were right. It wasn't any of the three. Then there was Frizell's indistinct voice on the phone. And the fact that though he had a home, he was in the habit of eating breakfast at that drug store. Could he have been angry at his mother over something?"

"Like wanting to marry Donna Patton?"

"Right. His mother answered the phone. When she heard a woman's voice, she pretended to be her son. Didn't even want him talking to a woman."

"And she committed murder rather than lose him?"

"Right. The possessive type."

"And strong as an ox. Hey, you'd better watch her!"

Lee Frizell's mother was showing signs of waking up.

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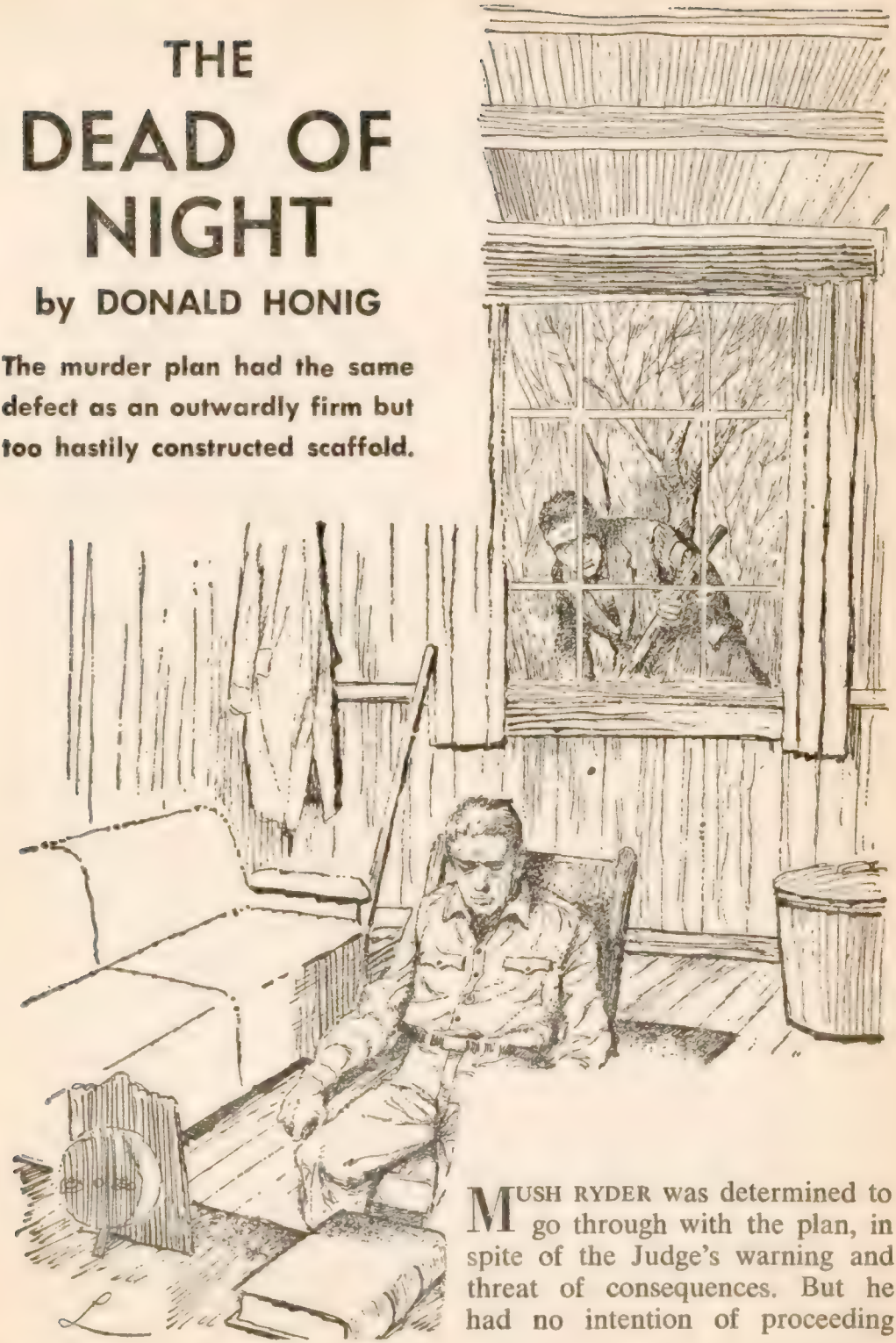
THE DEAD OF NIGHT

by DONALD HONIG

The murder plan had the same defect as an outwardly firm but too hastily constructed scaffold.



MUSH RYDER was determined to go through with the plan, in spite of the Judge's warning and threat of consequences. But he had no intention of proceeding

blindly. What he had made up his mind to do would enable him to exact vengeance and circumvent the law as well. It was not what people knew or thought that hanged a man, but what they could *prove*.

And Mush knew Judge Stetterson's stern fidelity to the law. He would be certain to insist upon incontrovertible proof before allowing a conviction—no matter what he believed in his own heart.

Mush had made his mind up at the hearing, when he had looked at Adamson as the Judge was rendering the verdict. The Judge had ruled that the shooting had been justified even if Adamson's action had been rash and regrettable. Adamson defended his action with terse and cranky words. Dewey—Mush's wild, headstrong son—had tried to steal Adamson's horse.

"Not for the sake of evil," Mush said bitterly, "but to use for the night so he could ride to see a friend in Shantytown."

"I have a right to defend my property as I see fit," Adamson said.

Dewey had been doing things like that for years. He was an acknowledged nuisance in Capstone. But Adamson had gone too far. It had been the furious act of an impetuous man, irremediable and unforgivable. But Adamson showed no remorse. For Mush that was one half of the terrible thing. The churlish little man showed no remorse whatever for what he had done.

After the hearing they filed out of the Judge's white house; Adamson, small and mulishly tight-lipped, passing before Mush's flat, somber eyes, aware of Mush's eyes following him, feeling them in his back like pointed objects until he was outside with the others.

One of the men said to Adamson, "You'd better be careful now."

"I'm not afraid of him," Adamson said. "Let him come."

"He's taken his oath on it."

"I'll tell you again: I'm not afraid," Adamson said. "And if he does it, then he'll answer for it. No one gets away with murder."

And one of Dewey's cousins, standing nearby, said, "No, Adamson. Not even you."

Inside, the two of them remained, Mush Ryder and Judge Stetterson. Mush was still standing where he had stood gazing and immobile the whole hour of the hearing, his face unchanged now, as expressionless as it had been then.

The Judge rose from behind the desk, slowly, taking a shrewd appraisal of Mush's stolid and implacable figure. The Judge went to the window and stood, the yellow sunshine glancing over his shoulder and slanting forward in graceful descent to the rug, its shaft communicating the languorous

motion of myriad dust motes.

The Judge's trouble eyes studied the willow beside the window but his thoughts dwelled upon the somber, depthless man behind him. "I know what you're thinking, Mush," he said. "But you can't do it."

Mush said nothing. He had deep respect for the Judge. It did not mean, though, that he would heed the Judge's counsel, only that he would not contend with him. It was only because of this esteem that he waited patiently for the Judge to finish.

"You'll find yourself in more trouble than you can fix," the Judge said. "I'm not asking you to forgive or forget what happened; I don't expect that. But I won't stand for any reprisal. This isn't one of those wide-open Western boom towns. No matter what has happened, what has been done against you, the law still does not belong to Mush Ryder or any other individual. The law is a canopy under which we all must live and which we must learn to respect if we are to continue to exist."

The Judge turned then and looked across the sunlit room at Mush. His tone was firm now. "You try and adapt the law to your own needs and you'll pay the price. If it isn't the law's price then it will be the price of your conscience, or the price of the Almighty. Law does not only exist in books or courtrooms. It is a lethal, mysterious force . . . and it always wins."

Mush's lips compressed tightly, rounded his jaw.

"I'll pay the same as he did," he said. "Nothing."

Then Ryder left, his sullen figure passing noiselessly into the corridor.

SO HE WAS determined to do it. They all knew it, Adamson and Judge Stetterson and the others. But Mush knew too that the Judge would see him on the gallows for it. His desire for vengeance was hot and implacable but it was not reckless or foolish. When it happened people would know of course that he had done it—and he wanted them to know. But he would make sure that there would be no proof that could be used to hang him.

Adamson, a widower for several years now, lived alone. His children, grown and married, lived in their own homes. He had a small farm in one of the area's most isolated sections, beyond the marsh. The nearest place was the Duhegan farm where old Simon Duhegan lived alone and sat and smoked a pipe and kicked his ancient setter when it came sulking too close.

Mush was counting on Duhegan; not that the old man would wilfully participate in anything reprehensible. But if Mush happened to drop by in the evening

and sit for awhile—as he occasionally did—and talk until the old man became drowsy and dozed off—as he had done upon those other occasions—he could then slip out and hurry across the meadow to Adamson, do what he had to, and get back before Duhegan awoke.

Then he would laugh and tell the old man that he had dozed off for a minute or two—Mush would see that the clock verified this—and that would be his explanation for his whereabouts, locked tightly in Duhegan's cranky veracity.

Mush waited for a dark night. The pale arc of moon that had been lingering finally disappeared behind a phalanx of thick clouds that obscured all of the sky and shut the light from Capstone's roads and meadows.

At seven o'clock he stepped out onto the porch, had a long, profound look at the sky and then returned inside. He lifted his foot to a chair and began lacing his boots. His wife, a small, mournful, reticent creature, emerged from the kitchen and stared at him, reverent and afraid, as though he were an icon.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To Duhegan," he said.

"For what?" his wife wanted to know.

"Mind your business," Mush said.

He took his coat from the nail and went toward the door, pushing his arms into the sleeves. He went out. As though he had an eye in the back of his head he could see his wife's staring form darkening the yellow window, watching him. So he went out to the road and walked until she could no longer see him.

Then he hurried into the woods and came around to the barn from the rear. He stole around the side and faded into the door and went straight toward the stall where he had hidden the rifle. Pushing the stall door noiselessly aside, he knelt and rummaged in the straw for the weapon, his fingers slow and grasping.

But his wife's voice, melancholy and quiet, but firm, controlled,

came out of the dark to discover and accuse him. "It isn't there."

Unstartled, as if he had been expecting it, coldly angry, he looked over his shoulder and rose turning around. He saw her in the dark, near the corn crib, like a statue, profound and inscrutable for having spoken. He went toward her.

"Give it to me," he said.

"No, Mush."

She was holding it at her side. He took it from her unresisting hands. She began to tremble, then to sob.

"Don't do it, Mush," she begged.

"Go back into the house."

"They'll hang you for it. They'll know!"

He went out, walking quickly now, the anger settling deep inside him like a coiled thing to be summoned, to be unleashed later. He heard her cry his name, but her voice was far in the night, lost and hopeless, and his rapid walking soon took him far along the road and he didn't listen.

He took the back paths to avoid any encounters. Then he was pacing across the wind-whispering meadows behind town, moving in a sullenly measured way, his eyes fixed upon what he was going to do rather than what he could see. He held the rifle under the stock, the barrel slanted and nodding at the earth in a patient brooding rhythm.

When he came to Duhegan's house he left the rifle in the bushes and walked across the yard and mounted the porch. He knocked on the door. The old man's voice asked who it was.

"Mush," he said.

"Well," came the cranky rejoinder, "you know the way in."

Mush opened the door—it was never locked—and went in. The back of Duhegan's white head showed over the top of the chair before the fire. The old man was gazing into the fire, his eyes cloudy and pensive under their shaggy white brows. Already his eyes appeared quite tired, his head beginning the thoughtful little nodding that always preceded his dozing off. Mush sat on the chair next to him. Before the fire lay the setter, asleep.

"Fine night," the visitor said.

"It's of little interest to me," Duhegan said. "I've seen thousands of fine nights." He sighed. "And soon the finest of all will come."

Mush understood the reference. The old man often talked this way, wistfully, sometimes morbidly, detailing his ailments, his weariness.

"Not for a long while," Mush said. He took out his watch now and looked at it, then looked up at the huge clock on the mantlepiece. "I'm a bit slow," he mentioned casually. "I've got eight-fifteen."

Duhegan's eyes came up and fixed upon the clock; then dropped back to the fire.

They sat silently. Mush watched the old man. Duhegan's lined and bearded face grew dreamy with the idea of sleep. The fire danced hypnotically under his eyes. They began to open and close, more and more slowly. The old man's head slumped forward, his beard flattening on his faded flannel shirt.

Mush waited. Then, quietly, tentatively, he said, "Duhegan."

Breathlessly he watched the old man, the shut and unstirring eyelids.

"Duhegan."

Mush rose. He glanced at the clock. Then slowly he backed from the fire, watching the top of the chair where the slumped white head had disappeared. Soundlessly he opened the door and slipped out into the night, leaving the door slightly ajar.

He went down the porch steps and hurried across the yard to where he had left the rifle. Recovering it he went on, having a last backward glance at the house.

He went through the trees and emerged at the edge of Adamson's pasture, then proceeded across it. He could see the lone, box-shaped house standing off in a morose solitude suggestive of its occupant (and its builder, for Adamson had raised it with his own hands), its single light defining the window frame.

Mush went carefully over the furrows, measuring each step, searching for silent places on which to set his feet. His body beginning to contract into a crouch, like a man hungering to unleash violence, he stole up to the window, the light rising over him through the thin veil of curtains.

Adamson was sitting in the room, legs stretched out before him, contemplating the small red fire that ran lambent little flames over the logs. His face showed in profile to the figure crouched at the window.

Mush felt a cold malevolence dry his body and spread a film over his soul and he felt haunted, bloodless as he lifted his rifle and cradled the stock between his shoulder and the side of his face and took long and careful aim—not that he had to be that careful but because he wished to extend for as long as possible this moment of cold exulation.

Adamson was sitting so still, so poised, it seemed almost as if he knew, had adopted this attitude of wooden dignity as he waited for it to happen.

Then Mush fired. The rifle roared and the glass burst and the curtains flew and the whole window smashed and crumbled; and a sudden shattering redness stained

the profiled face as Adamson—still posed and wooden—went flying over on his side leaving the chair behind him starkly upright and empty like something startled into rigid terror.

Mush moved back as the curtains floated back down and resumed their staid columnar attitude. He lowered the rifle and stared with somber satisfaction at the crumpled, inert form. He moved away from the gaping window, the light sliding off him. Then he turned and walked with stubborn haste, then began to run clumsily across the pasture.

He ran in an old man's stubborn, broken way. He did not stop when he reached the woods but kept going, running with short unsure little steps as if performing some curious ceremonial dance down the vague, narrow trails.

When he saw Duhegan's house—it had taken him just five minutes to get back to it—Mush stopped and struggled for breath, gasping and wheezing for several minutes until his lung exertions became less. Again he hid the rifle in the bushes and walked across the yard and mounted the porch steps. He gazed at the strip of light which the slightly ajar door let fall.

He entered the cabin and closed the door behind him. He walked across the room, his heart running excitedly not merely in triumph but in the pleasure of his achievement, with the cleverness that had made it possible.

He looked up at the clock. Now he would set it back and sit down and wake the old man and tell him he had been dozing for a minute or two. As he went toward the clock he passed the chair and glanced down at Duhegan. The old man was slumped to one side in the chair. Mush paused and stared closely. The old man seemed so unnaturally still.

"Duhegan," he said. He repeated it, his voice louder.

He reached down and touched the old man's shoulder, shaking him. There was no response. Now Mush's voice shot out of him in wild panic, *"Duhegan!"*

He shook the thin bony shoulder with all his strength. The old man's body crumpled into the other side of the chair, all life and breath gone from it, drained and abandoned.

Mush gazed in silent horror at the thing in the chair, drawing back from it. The silence massed around him, leering and sardonic. Outside, the wind ran soft laughter through the trees. And as he listened he recalled now Judge Stetterson's words: *The law must win, the price must be paid, be it to the courts, the conscience, or the hand of the Almighty.*

(Continued from other side)

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